



1663

PRODIGIES

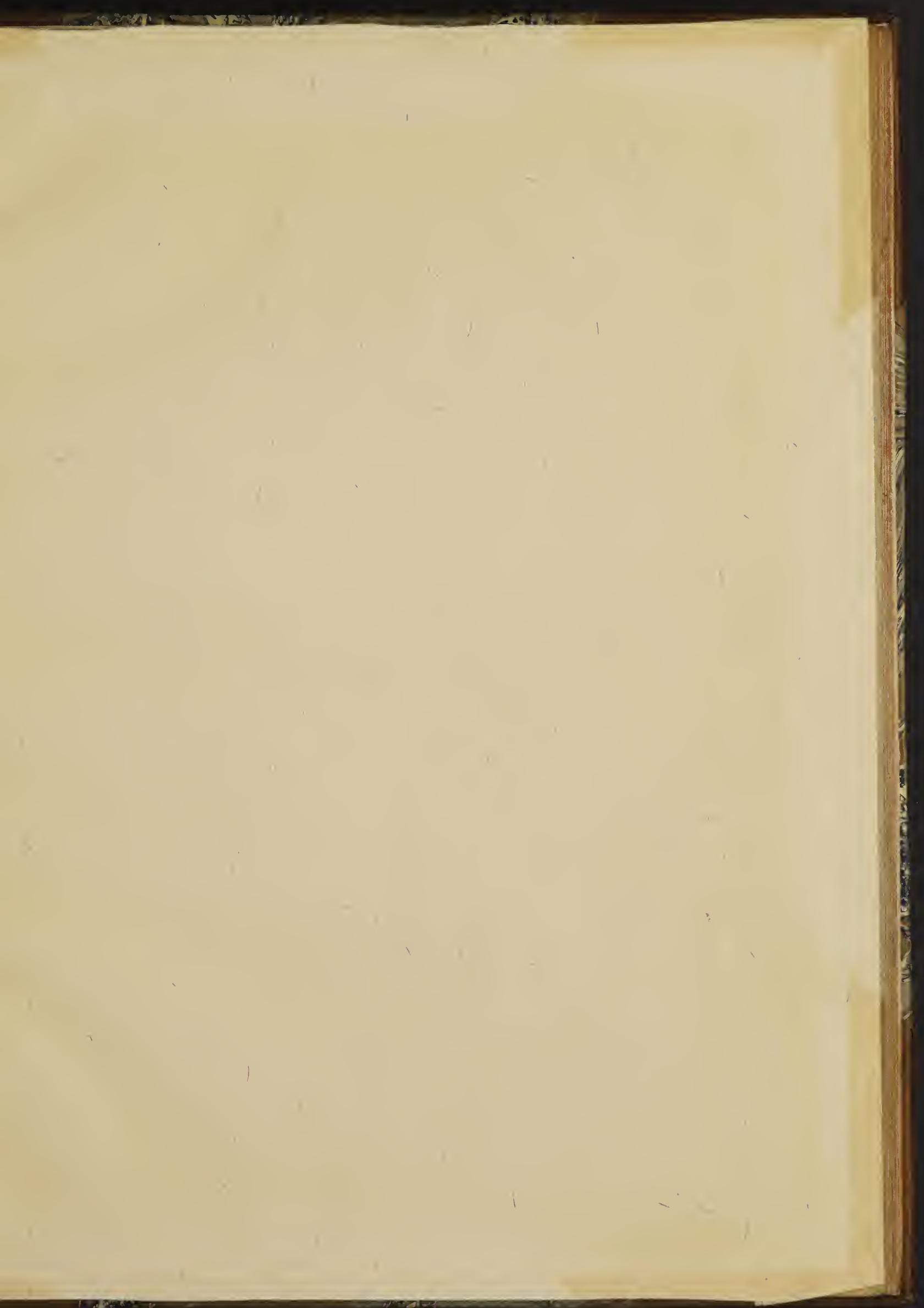
SPENCER





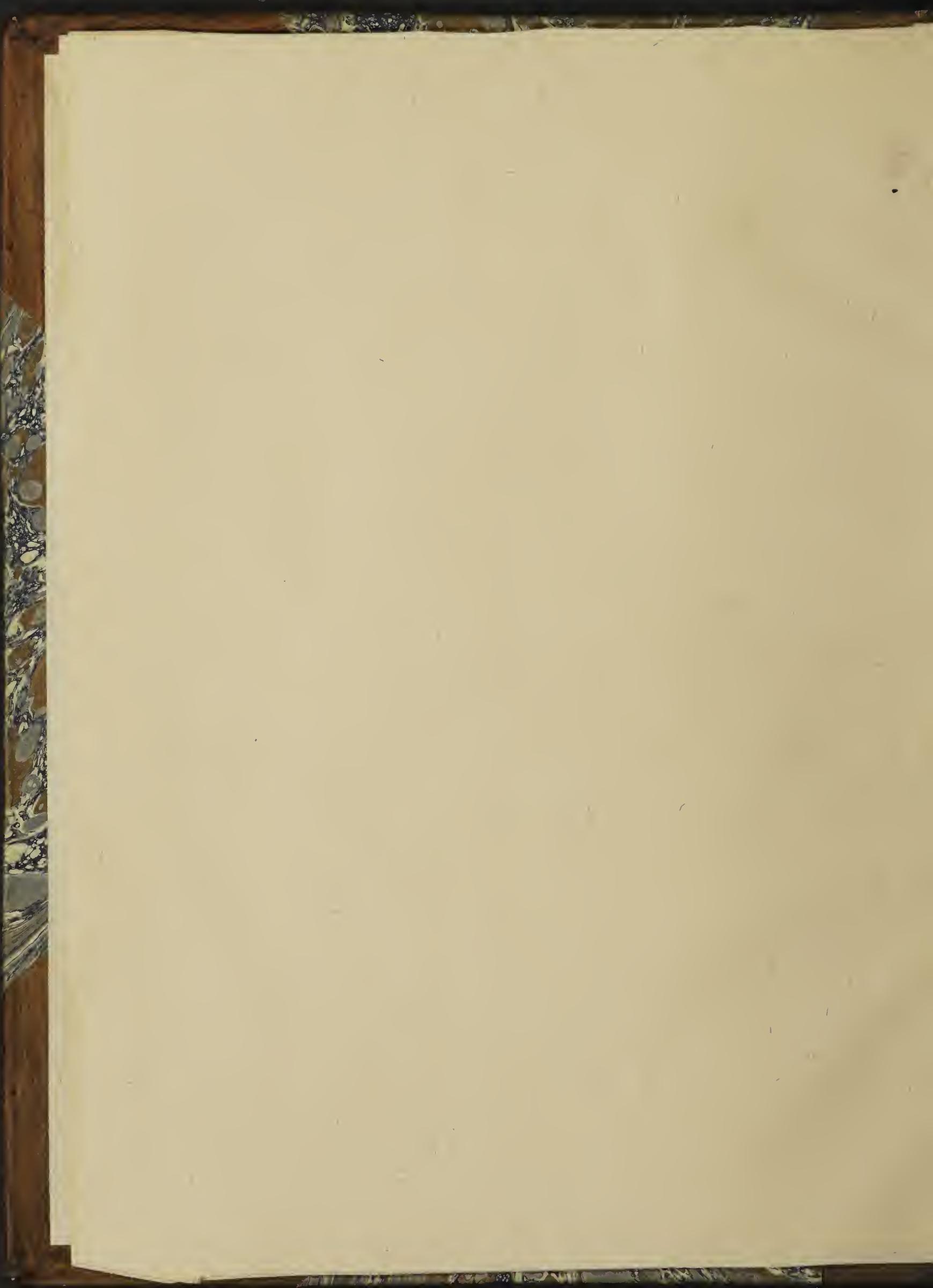


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J. Needham. Aug. 12<sup>th</sup> 1708. p 09.

A  
DISCOURSE  
CONCERNING  
PRODIGIES:  
WHEREIN  
The Vanity of Presages by them is  
reprehended, and their true and proper  
Ends asserted and vindicated.

By JOHN SPENCER, B.D.  
Fellow of Corpus Christi Colledge  
in Cambridge.

Liv. Hist. l. 24. 9.

Prodigia multa nunciata sunt, quæ quò magis credebant simplices & religiosi  
homines, eò etiam plura nunciabantur.

Baron. Sapient. Vet. Fab. 6. Pan, sive Natura.

Natura rerum omnibus viventibus indidit metum, ac formidinem, vitæ atque es-  
sentiæ suæ conservatricem, ac mala ingruētia vitantem ac depellantem: Ve-  
runtamen eadem Natura modum tenere nescia est; sed timoribus salutaribus  
semper vanos & inanes admiscet, adeo ut Omnia ( si intus conspici darentur )  
Panicis terroribus plenissima sint; præsertim humana, quæ superstitione ( quæ  
verè nihil aliud quam Panicus terror est ) in immensum laborant.

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## The Preface.



He most proper Objects of admiration in the Divine wisdom, are Βάθος καὶ πλεπτική, the un-  
searchable depth and rich variety thereof. Rom.11.33.

That admirable diversity of gifts and abilities of minde, vouchsafed to men to serve the necessities of those times and places to which they are appointed, that elegant variety of Beings in the world, that gratefull disparity of occurences which the history of every age of the world entertains us with,

give assurance that there is a riches and pleonasm (as of Grace, so) of Wisdom in God : as which (like some full word that cannot be delivered of all that notion and fence with which it is pregnant without variety of expressions) cannot be understood and made out without the large paraphrase of such a multitude of excellent instances and displays thereof.

And the faithfulness of Nature to its Original laws of motion, the continuance of all things as they were from the beginning of the Creation, awaken a considerate minde into a quick and lively sense of the depth thereof. *Nulla litura est in libro naturæ.* God never saw it necessary (as upon maturer thoughts) to correct and amend any thing in this great Volume of the Creation, since the first edition thereof; which sufficiently resolves us, that all things were issued at first by a minde that doth not *ad pauca respicere*, but that did look the whole systeme of the Creation quite through, and comprehend at once the several motions and mutual aspects of secondary Agents, from the beginning of time to the end thereof.

This general constancy and harmony of Nature in its operations, is not so much removed as commended by (those petty discords) prodigious occurrences, whose rarity sometimes commands our notices and regards. These are but the Anomalies of Nature, some temporary exceptions from her more common rules of motion; she runs sometimes against her bias, when the rub of some unusual impediment disturbs her, but quickly recovers into her more easie and native course. No kingdom is simply ἀσταύτος but that of heaven, and no law absolutely immutable but that of eternal righteousness. Nature is but *Ars Dei*, and so admits variety, but righteousness is *Imago Dei*, an emanation from, and transcript of the Nature of him with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. Heb.12.28.

Now these *Errata Naturæ*, Natures steppings out of its more common road, have been received by the faith (phancy) of most times *tanquam Dei Feciales*, as Gods Heralds to proclaim his purposes of war and vengeance upon men; and as a kinde of reall prophesies of some impendent evils. It hath been concluded that as *Natura libera*, Nature in its usual freedom, doth declare the glory and power of God, Psal. 19.1. *Natura superata*, Nature quite conquer'd (as in a miracle) doth

## The Preface.

report and confirm the truths and counsels of God; so *Natura impedita*, Nature disturb'd and hinder'd (as in a Prodigy) doth proclaim his (approaching) judgements.

The designe therefore of the present Discourse, is (with freedom and sobriety) to make enquiry how far any kinde of Prodigies (*signal or pœnal*) may be drawn into consequence to conclude the counsels of heaven from them; and whether that Faith and Religion with which the multitude receive them, be not (especially) owing to those two credulous and superstitious principles [Fear and Ignorance] which usually manage and deprave their affections and conclusions.

I readily foresee, that as to some persons (more easily moved by the common ayr of popular prejudice) Religion and a great Truth will seem too much concerned in the argument, to be dishonoured to a question; so to others of more severe and examined principles, it will appear to hold too much of imagination or imposture, to receive the credit of a serious debate; and therefore had I designed no higher (in these papers) than barely to be publick, I should have made choice of some more obliging and inviting theme, and with which my thoughts have been longer acquainted: But that which thus far reconciled me to the Argument, was a regard to the Profitableness, Pleasure, Seasonableness, of a Discourse thereupon.

First, It will (in designe at least) be profitable to very great purposes, viz.

First, To secure the peace and tranquillity of common life. For if whenever the skie is red and lowring (the face of heaven puts on a different colour and appearance from what it usually looks upon us with) we must conclude some approaching storm in the state, every man must needs hold the peace and serenity of his minde by a very crackt and litigious title. How can a man (as he is counselled) eat his bread with joy, and drink his wine with a cheerfull heart, if every strange accident must perswade him that there is some sword of vengeance hanging over his head (by a threed) ready to fall down upon himself, or that common body he relates to, in whose welfare every good man concerns himself? Mens hearts will be alway failing them for fear, and for looking after the things which are coming on the earth, Luke 21.26.

Eccl. 9.7.

Si fulserit, si  
tonuerit, si  
ractum aliquid  
fuerit de cœlo,  
si ostenti simi-  
le, natum fa-  
ctumve quip-  
piam, (quorum  
necessitate plerun-  
q; aliquod eve-  
nientia) supersti-  
tioso nunquam  
liceat quieta  
mente confiste-  
re. Tul. de  
Divin. 1.2.

A sense hereof gave occasion to the Heathen Poet (whose Philosophy or Divinity served him not to reprehend the superstition of Prodigies) thus to implead the Majesty of heaven for alarming the world continually with these direfull Omens of an approaching evil,

-----*Cur hanc Tibi (Rector Olympi)*-----

*Sollicitis visum mortalibus addere curam,*

*Noscant venturas ut dira per Omina clades?* Lucan. Pharsal. l. 2.

Which words (that I may the better serve my purpose of them) I thus make English.

Why doth Heavens Lord foretell mens fate  
By Omens? and so, antedate  
Their evils; (twice unhappy!) must  
Men take up misery on trust?

I'd yeeld ex tempore my breath,  
Nor would I die for fear of death.

And

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And ( indeed ) I understand not how many men could reconcile their secure and quiet thoughts to their vain persuasions concerning Prodigies, but that I observe their usage is upon any such occurrences to charm down their fears with such like words, *What these things signify time to come will declare.*

Secondly, It will also serve the honour of Religion, which the common reverence of Prodigies doth greatly trespass upon ; and that,

1. As it detains men under a constant Pædagogy to many base and servile fears. Whence Religion is easily concluded a great Adversary to ( what it mainly designes to bring on upon the world ) a true generousnes, and universal freedom of spirit, and that its whole business is to subdue the spirits of men to some cold and little observances, pale and feminine fears. Hence men quickly grow weary of it, as of a yoke that continually galls them, and conclude themselves gainers if they may but purchase manhood with Atheism. This was that (especially) which gave *Epicurus* the confidence of thrusting God and Religion quite out of the world, and solving all the *Phænomena* of Nature without calling in any assistance from the power and providence of any Agent superiour to Naturall, even that bondage and servility, which he observed mens ears bor'd unto by the Religion of his times, which was nothing but a timerous and base observance of the Signes of heaven, direfull Omens, prodigious occurrences, against whose evil abodeiments, men arm'd themselves with ( paper against pod-guns) a few bodily and ineffective Rites and Ceremonies. Fear bindes in the powers of the soul, debars it the easie use and enjoyment of it self, and therefore the soul hates the womb that is conceived to bear it. Religion can never be amiable, till it appear designed not to increase the fears of men, but truly to cure and remove them.

2. The superstition of Prodigies commits no small waste upon Religion, in regard the fears it creates abuse the mindes of men, proving generally but *è vitro fulgura*, vain as the shadows of the night. These Prodigies threaten a vengeance to we know not whom, and to fall we know not when. Now as the *τέρατα φάδες*, the false and tinsel miracles among the Papists most fatally wound Religion, because deriving a suspicion upon the true ones when once detected; so false and delusive fears introduc't ( upon pretences religious ) disparage and discredit all the true ones, and Religion is in danger to be concluded but *mendacium officiosum*, abusing the weakness of some men to the service of the common peace and quiet. Religion is not to be dallied with, *non patitur lusum fides*. Pious frauds ( as strong-waters do the body ) may perhaps help Religion in a fit, but ( if used familiarly ) disable the native heat and strength thereof. Hay and stubble laid upon a good foundation ( such I account well-meant forgeries in Religion ) will catch fire and consume at last, and leave a great stain and soil upon the very foundation.

3. As it reports Religion a Systeme of some pitifull rites, sneaking and beggerly entertainments of the minde : there is nothing more effectually enclines subtle mindes to Atheism, as the evaporating of Religion into a multitude of touchy and critical modes and observations, which cannot command a reverence to themselves before discerning minds, which

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soon see through them, they are so thin and airy. To dismis this second particular. If these devoute perswasions concerning Prodigies, produce not in some minds any such sowre thoughts of Religion, 'tis solely oweing to the power of some happier principles in conjunction with them by whose activity, the malign influence of the former is overpowr'd and corrected.

Thirdly, *It may be of Use to reprehend a very common, and Pernicious Error.*

1. *A very vulgar and common Error.* I profess not to know any one Error to which all times and Persons have been so fatally abus'd withall as this of presages by prodigies: whereas there are some false notions which are *Errores Personæ*, others which are *Errores Seculi*, holding of the peculiar temper, condition, circumstances, of the Person, or Age, in which found; this seems to be (in a maner) *Error Mundi*, having been justifi'd by *Jews, Gentiles, Christians, (some) Ancients, Modern, Learned, Simple*, as will more fully appear in the sequele, and may in part by some few instances, which (to serve the necessity of the present Argument) I shall here insert.

2 Mac 5. 4.

Monstra.  
Ostenta.  
Prodigia.  
Portenta.

Ἐπὶ μεγάλοις  
τείγην ὡρά-  
γματι, καὶ με-  
γίσταις μελα-  
βολαῖς τὴν ἐπι-  
τρύπην, οὐα-  
τέλλειν τὰς  
τοιέτας αἰσέ-  
γας, σφυρίνον-  
τας ἢ μελα-  
στόσεις βασι-  
κεῖσθαι, &c.

Orig. in Cels.

2. i.

D. Ham-  
mond. Def.

Liturg. S. 53.

Grot. Not. in  
Prophe. Joel.

2. 30.

How far the Heathen were leaven'd with this fond notion, the names and titles whereby they us'd to express any such Anomalous instances in Nature, is but too pregnant a demonstration, all of them carrying with them a promise of foreshewing somewhat Future. (that which perhaps hath betrayed a great many to a like opinion of them, most people understanding little besides names and words) Amongst the Fathers (to do them right) I find none so express as Origen, who speaking concerning Comets, tells us it hath been observed, that so oft as any great and eminent changes happen in earth, such stars have been known; foreshewing the translations of Kingdoms, or wars, or whatever may happen of force sufficient for any great commotions and disturbances here below. Amongst the more Modern it may here suffice to take notice that the first occasion and Original of Rogation week (observ'd now upon the religion of greater principles) in the church is by Historians (as we are told) refer'd to Claud. Mamertus Bishop of Vienne in France, for the averting of some judgments which (upon the observation of many inauspicious accidents and prodigies) were sadly fear'd to be approaching. Among the Learned, the height of Grotius calls my eye upon Him, who thus expresseth himself, *solen magnas rerum conversiones præcedere Cometæ, gladii ardentes, aliaque signa ejusmodi.* As for the common sort of men, as they are (by the plainness of their state) more apt to retain a quick sense of those early notions quæ sequuntur Naturam simplicem, which follow Nature, simple and unsuborn'd, by subtily, interest, or passion, (for we find the notices of a God, of a future state, of the souls immortality taking faster hold of the populace then of some of the more subtle and discursive Philosophers) sowithall are more impressive those which follow Naturam vitiatam, Nature tainted and deprav'd with guilt and ignorance, and the many Idols consequent unto both; amongst which this notion concerning Presages by Prodigies will appear (in its place) to be no small one, so that it may seem like some weeds

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weeds in the water, to have a very diffus'd and broad leaf but growing from a very weak and pitifull root, (generally receiv'd, but without, yea against evident and apparent reason.)

2. A very pernicious error, as having a most malign influence upon the Minde and Understanding, upon Philosophy, and upon Divinity.

1 Upon the mind and Understanding it self. No two things do so usurp and wast the faculty of Reason, as *Enthusiasm* and *Superstition*: the one binding a faith, the other a fear upon the Soul, to which they (vainly) intitle some divine discovery; both train a man up to beleieve beyond possibility of proof, to deliver over himself (in a kind of captivity of Understanding) to the confident dictates of the sons of imagination, to determine of things by measures phantastical (rules which cannot maintain themselves in credit by any sober and sev're discourses) both inure the mind rather to divine then to judge, to dispute from Maximes rather vehement then solid, and place a man (if he chance to mistake) beyond possibility of conviction, it being in vain to press an argument upon him that thinks he can confront a Revelation, a miracle, or some strange judgement upon his Adversary, against your conclusion; nor is there a greater evil then wickedness establisht by a law, and error by religion, and an ignorant devotion toward God. And therefore no pains and care too much, to remove these two beams from the eye of humane Understanding, rendring it so insufficient for a just and faithfull discovery of objects in Religion or common science.

2. Upon Philosophy. For when once Superstition hath advanced these Prodigies into the repute of divine messengers, it will easily be inferr'd a necessary respect towards them to keep some distance, and not to approach them too nearly by too busy and curious an enquiry into their natural and immediate causes. We find among the Grecians those which first made a tender of the natural causes of lightnings and tempests to the (as yet) ruder ears of men, were presently blasted with the reproach of Atheists; as if to shew, how many wheels, in some great Engine, move in subordination to the production of some great work, were to obscure and eclypse the art of the Artificer.

3. Upon Divinity also; Because the conceit conciliates reverence to a lie, and christens the vain and soft fears of ignorance by the name of prudent foresights and religious observances of God: whence the soul is brought (like some of the ancient Heathens) to give worship to its very passions and diseases. Stories of Prodigies may perhaps serve to deceive the tedium of a winter night, but when once they advance (*à focis ad Aras*) from the chimney corner to the Church, and are adopted the measures of a religious faith or fear, advanc't the serious motives of Repentance, 'tis time to throw contempt upon them. A lie never did, never could serve the interest of truth.

The Church of Rôme (whether to serve the interest of Philosophy or Divinity, I shall not here concern my self to enquire) hath express her self (*fas est & ab hoste doceri*) by her representatives a great adversary

Pessimum est  
& plane pestis  
& tabes inel-  
lectus si vanis  
accedat vene-  
ratio.

Verul. descr.  
Glob. intel.

c. 6.

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Casaub. Epist.  
dedic. in  
Polyb.

De Divin.  
l. 2.

adversary to this instance of superstition, the observation of portentous accidents. We find in the Catalogue of books prohibited by Urban. viii. this interdicted among the rest, *Author Chronicis prodigiorum & ostensorum ab exordio Mundi usque ad An. 1557.* And *Gregory the Great* (represented to posterity as one most studious of the propagation of the Christian Religion) was acted by so great a zeal against it, that we are told he took care for the extirpation of that (otherwise) excellent Historian [Livy] out of all Libraries, *ob tam frequentem & accuratam portentorum enumerationem*, for his so frequent and critical enumeration of all the *Portenta* which seem'd to attend any great Action. Though I think too hasty and severe a judgement past upon that Historian, whom we shall easily perceive, not more leaven'd (in mind) with that kind of superstition, than *Herodotus* or *Tacitus*, and others which stood in no better light then he did. However much may be pardon'd to a great zeal to a good undertaking. The mind of man was made for Truth and Goodness, and therefore should not in any matter (if the remedy fell within our compass) be put off with the bare form and idol of either; But where an error hath once ceas'd it, which is (what some say of a comet) both *malum & causa mali*, an evil and a pregnant cause of evils, no need then of the voice of thunder to awaken charity to endeavour (as it can) its remedy and removal.

Thirdly, *This Discourse may be profitable to serve the just interest of State, and that;*

1. *As it tends to secure the honour of Acts of State and the results of publick counsel.* How mean a value and regard shall the issues of the severest debates, and the commands of Authority, find, if every pitiful Prodigy-monger have credit enough with the People to blast them, by telling them that heaven frowns upon them, and that God writes his displeasure against them, in black and visible characters, when some sad Accident befalls the compliers with them?

2. *As it tends to make men more manageable to the commands of Authority,* which easy men may quickly be frighted from by such images of straw, as the relations of monsters and strange sights are. Of what ill consequence the *Romanes* at last found the observation of signes and *Omens* to be (in war especially) appears from what *Tully* hath left recorded viz. that howsoever they were in his time *ab Urbanis retenta*, retain'd in some repute, with the Citizens, (for good reasons of state) yet they were *a bellicis sublata*, quite banisht the camp, because they found that the ignorant multitude (like beasts) would not drive well, if any such bug-bears were suffered to lie before them. Now where weak men (like the horse of *Alexander*) are ready to start and fly off from their Rulers and Guides, because frighted with shadows, 'tis but a charity to them and the publick to turn them to the Sun, to lead them to the light by a faithfull information of their judgements.

3. *As it ministers to the quiet and tranquillity of the State.* That man that hath already incircled his own head with a *Glory* and is strongly perswaded that Gods honour and the Gospel stand or fall with his

private

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private Opinion will need no greate Rhetorick to perswade him to receive a prodigy as a sign from heaven to encourage any endeavours to advance it. Prophesies concerning the deaths of great persons, or changes in the State, (a kind of weak ayr which carries about and commands but the more chaffie and lighter faiths) the wisdom of the Nation hath judg'd of such evil consequence in a State, as by two several Acts of Parliament (under severe penalties) to interdict the publication of them. Now Prodigies have ever been propos'd as a kind of types and real Prophesies of some black days, and some wonderfull alterations at hand; and therefore may easily be presum'd to have as malign an influence upon the people (apt to be mightily mov'd with what ever comes toward them with any shadow and promise of Divine and Sacred) as the former:

Stat. 3 Edw.  
6. c. 15.  
Stat. 5 Eliz.  
c. 15.

Among the Ancient Romanes subtil Statesmen made use of that Superstitious observation of Omens and Prodigies, (to which they saw the people, in the ruder ages especially so invincibly addicted) to act and manage them to what perswasions might best serve the necessities of State; to which purpose they had their *Collegia Vatum*, Publick Diviners, who knew to bendl these Osier accidents (as the *Mufeti* can doe the *Alcoran*) to suck a fence and signification as might make the easie multitude manageable to the purposes and designs of their Rulers. And 'twere to be wisht that some Christians had not since transcrib'd the copy of this Ethnick example, and endeavour'd to serve some secular ends upon the credulity and superstition of the multitude, by the tending of any such Prodigies, or Prophecies to their hopes or fears. All that I shall add further in this place, is this. He that alledgedeth barely the Spirit of God to justify an Opinion in Religion may thank himself, if he perish in the other World; and he that quotes onely a Prodigy in Nature to encourage any sedition in State, may thank himself if he perish in this.

Secondly, This Discourse (without oweing much to the Author) will be pregnant with pleasure and delight. For things rare and unusual (the subject thereof) call forth the Soul to a very quick and gratefull attendance, whilst matters of greater worth and moment, of more familiar occurrence, (like things often handled and blown upon) loose their value and lustre in its eye: Now the contemplation of things new and strange, gives the Soul so high a pleasure;

1. Because they prove the occasions of wonder and admiration, which the Philosopher ranks among the τὰ οὐδέα, things pleasant and delightfull; because (saith He) admiration comes attended with a tacite desire of learning [more fully the nature and causes of its object] though I rather think, because admiration is (as the Lord Verulam well stiles it) abrupta quædam scientia, an Essay to knowledge, besides we shall observe that the acts of the Soul which are intense, and call it much off from it self, [as profound contemplations, great joys, ecstacies a great love, and so, high admirations] create it a most chaste and refin'd pleasure.

2. Because Objects not as yet fully known (as objects rare and strange are) keep the Soul in a State of hope and expectation of some huge satisfaction

Tὸ μαρτυρεῖν  
καὶ τὸ διαμά-  
ζειν οὐδὲ οὐ-  
τοὶ τὸ πολὺ<sup>ν</sup>  
εἰν μηδὲ τὸ πε-  
δαυπαζεῖν τὸ  
ἐπιδιηγεῖν  
[μαρτυρεῖν] δὲν  
Arist. Rhet.

l. i. c. 11.

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in a greater intimacy and acquaintance with them. Now (as to this Worlds heaven) the *Viatores* (because improving their felicities by an active phancy) are usually more happy then the *comprehensores*.

3 Because the Soul of Man affects a kinde of infinity in its objects. The affections are alway reaching after new pleasures, the desires are carried forth after new possessions, phancy is perpetually entertaining the minde with new Ideas, the Understanding is continually calling for a new Scene of contemplations. *Scaliger* alledgedeth this reason of the delight men naturally take in fables, the pictures of Anticks, and Monsters, (things rare and extraordinary) even because they exceed the common limits of truth, and mend the prospect of the Soul; which by its unconfin'd desires and motions gives it self to understand, that it is of higher extraction then that of a beast, and cannot truly compose and enjoy it self but in Union with God, the infinite Ocean of truth and Goodness.

Thirdly, That which further engag'd my thoughts upon this Argument, was a consideration of the Seasonableness thereof. We have been of late perswaded by three or four several impressions of Books (as there never wanted those which would farme the weakness and easiness of the multitude) that *England* is grown *Africa*, and presents us every year (since the Return of his Majesty) with a new Scene of Monstrous and strange sights, and that our lot is fallen into an Age of Wonders; and all held forth to the People (like black clouds before a storm) the harbingers of some strange and unusual plagues approaching in the State. A matter not much to be wondered at, when the Nation (like the Womb of Rebekah) carries such striving and contesting Parties.

The Poets feign the Giants (the sons of *Earth*) to have bidden battel to the Gods, and to have perisht by a thunderbolt in the confidence of that attempt. And the *Earth* (their Mother) to avenge the death of her Sons, to have brought forth their last Sister, Fame. A fable expounded by the excellent *Verulam*, of unquiet and seditious persons (a kind of *Filiæ Terræ*, the creatures of the People, usually envious against their Rulers, and soon weary of the present State of things) who when crusht and ruin'd in their attempts against the Gods on earth (their rightfull Governours) their fall is aveng'd by a *fama querula & seditiosa*, popular clamours, libels, odious representations of them to derive upon them the common envy, with which may be number'd the reports of strange prodigies and prophecies giving hopes of some approaching change of affairs (an observation which I am sure will offend none that are studious of the Sacred character, Persons which are quiet in the land.)

To all that hath been hitherto discourt concerning the profit, pleasure, seasonableness of the Argument before us, I shall superadd this one consideration to excuse the trouble these papers give the Reader. A hasty, ignorant, rash rejection of things which obtain (though unworthily) the place and repute of religious and sacred, (as prodigies doe) gives no small advantage to Atheism. An over-hasty

Mens nostra  
ē fabulis &  
monstrorum  
picturis, capit  
Voluptatem,  
propterea  
quod exupe-  
rant vulgares  
limites veri-  
tatis, &c.  
aspernatur  
enim certo-  
rum finium  
præscripti-  
onem. Exerc.  
307. S. 11.

De sapient.  
Vet. c. 9.

Psal. 35. 20.

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hasty pulling off (even) the wens and excrescencies from the body of Religion, may prove of a bad consequence, as a permitting them still to grow upon it. As our Saviour would not be call'd *Good* in an ignorant courtesie, so neither should these Prodigies, *Vain*, in an ignorant scorn : He that (without light and resolution) slighteth and neglects things, but presum'd sacred and religious, is but a more fortunate Atheist, and more harmlessly profane. Look as (sometimes) Persons once Sacred, found guilty of capital crimes, are solemnly degraded, before they are executed ; so things once reputed Sacred, should be first degraded (by a well inform'd judgment) from that Opinion and degree of respect they held in mens minds, before they be thrown off, and deliver'd to their neglect and disregard.

And this is all that I thought necessary to premise, to level the way to a fairet reception and interpretation of the ensuing Discourse.

J. S.

B 2

A DIS-

PIGA

88



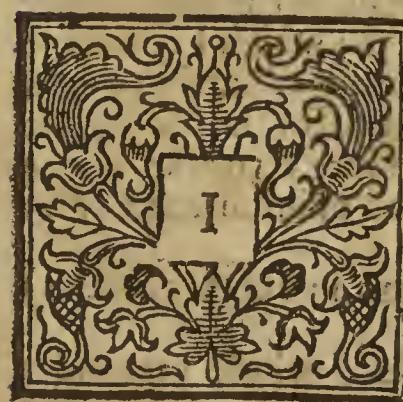
# A DISCOURSE Concerning PRODIGIES:

Wherein the Vanity of Presages by them is reprehended, and their true and proper Ends asserted and vindicated.

## CHAP. I.

### Concerning the several kinds of Prodigies.

Great wonders of divine efficiency alone: these divided into Ordinary and Extraordinary. The kinds of the former toucht upon. Wonders extraordinary (comprised under the general name of Prodigies) divided into Signal and Penal. The use of that phrase excused. Prodigies Signal, Natural, Præternatural, Supernatural, what. The Prodigies related in the Ethnick Stories, excluded this number, and why. Prodigies Penal described.



T is the Prerogative Royal of the King of heaven, that He onely doeth great wonders, Psa. 136. 4. commands Nature to what actions, into what posture, may best serve the ends of his own honour and wisdom. The biggest works the devil doeth, have but a tympany of greatness, are a kinde of practical fallacies; as he is but *Simia Dei*, so the greatest work which falls within his compass, is but *Simia Miraculi*, and owes the wonder it meets with, not to its own real greatness, but our Ignorance.

Now these wonders are either Ordinary or Extraordinary.

First; There are some of his wonders of Ordinary and constant residence (a kinde of more remarkable passages in the Book of Nature) such as are,

i. The

## Of the several kinds of Prodigies.

2

Isa. 9.6.

1. The *Monadica Naturæ*, By which I take leave to understand (at present) those works in Nature which are of so private and peculiar a make and character, that they stand almost alone, and hardly admit their pattern in the whole Systeme of the Creation, such as are boyling springs, flaming mountains, petrifying waters, vast chōsmes and hiatus in the Earth, &c. the instances whereof are so various, that there is no countrey but hath its *miranda*, which call upon it to pay the constant tribute of a deliberate and judicious admiration to him, who seems to inscribe his own name [ Wonderfull ] upon all these works of his.

2 The *Lusus Naturæ*, (as I may style them) the disports of Nature; such works wherein the hand of Nature breaks and divides (as it were) the plain ground of some common nature into an elegant variety of Individuals, different in shape and temper; as is seen in dogs and roses, &c. as also those works wherein (because delighted as much with consent as variety) *se sequiturq; fugitq;* she seems to follow and fly from her self both at once, aping and imitating her own works, in one element, by some similar figures or dispositions; in different pieces of the creation, in another: (which serve as a kinde of gratefull repeats in the harmony of the world.)

3. The *Varietates Naturæ*, elegant and copious varieties of Nature, appearing in the various species of things, which different countreys so entertain the curiosities of each other with, that one appears a kinde of constant Prodigy to another. All these have employed the hours of other men, and besides are more properly entred among the rarities then the Prodigies of Nature, and so fall not within the lines of our present Argument.

Secondly, There are *Wonders Extraordinary*, such are they which happen but now and then, and are a kinde of short and transient discords, stepping in sometimes to recommend the general harmony and evenes in the motions of Nature, and the Government of the world, comprised under the general name of *Prodigies*.

Now that division of these, which I shall premise to the ensuing discourse, shall be such as the necessity and designe thereof, rather then such as the laws of Logick, do prompt me to; which I conceive may be best serv'd, by dividing them into Prodigies (barely) *Signal* and *Penal*: For though I have no faith nor favour for the former, yet while I indite them at the bar of Reason, I am forc't to take notice of them under such names and titles, as common opinion hath affixt upon them.

Those which are (barely) *Signal* (such, I mean, in vulgar account) are of three sorts.

1. *Prodigies Natural*, such I reckon all those of whose particular and immediate causes (though rarely occurring) we are sufficiently resolv'd: such as are (to speak with the people) falling-stars, Earthquakes, Extraordinary Eclipses, the appearance of two or three Suns at once, some kinde of monstrous births. With these I number all events (besides the common road of Nature) owing to some accidental (though to us unknown) assistance or interruption of Agents

## Of the several kinds of Prodigies.

3

Agents purely natural, or some secret and reserved Law in Nature, as Comets, New-stars, some extraordinary alteration in the heavenly bodies, (as that in the Planet Venus, both as to colour and figure before the times of Christ, often mentioned by Astronomers from Varro and S. Austin) and the strange deliquum of light in the Sun about the death of Cæsar; Some unusual ebbings and flowings of the Sea. These, I reckon Prodigies Natural, all being but Natures acting of its part in a different habit, and giving us to know how it will exert it self, when such Agents, and such matter chance to meet.

S. Aug. de  
Civit. Dei.  
1.21.c.8.

2. *Prodigies præternatural*, such I account all strange Events, which hold of no steady causes, but are (to us) solely casual and uncertain; as the firing of a house by lightning, the coming to shore of some strange kinde of fish, the breaking off or standing still of Rivers, messages delivered by spirits, apparitions in the ayr (which are effects above a natural, and beneath a bare supernatural Agent.)

3. *Supernatural*, such as are Events of which Reason is sufficiently resolved, that they exceed the powers and sufficiencies of all Natural causes. For look as in Religion, there are quædam *juxta Rationem*, some things according to the common reason of all men, [viz. the doctrines of temperance, righteousness, obedience to God;] some things *præter rationem*, beside reason, [the discoveries of God, which reason now apprehends and seals unto, but could not Marte proprio, of it self reach unto;] some things *supra rationem* [the great Articles of Faith, transcendent to the capacity, as well as light of common reason, in the modes and circumstances of them:] So in the compass of Divine Providence, there are three sorts of works, *quædam juxta Naturam*, some according to the common Laws of Natures working; *quædam præter Naturam*, some beside common Nature, such are the Events we call Prodigies, which though according to Nature, as considered in such circumstances and co-incidence of causes, yet are beside it, considered in its more usual and familiar methods of action. *Quædam supra Naturam*, such are those alterations in Nature, which exceed the capacities of second causes. In a Prodigy (strictly taken) Nature suffers from it self, and is (in a sort) both victour and captive to it self; but in a Miracle, Nature is solely passive to that original Minde and Power which gave it its first Laws of motion.

These supernatural Prodigies (though I know not to beleieve any, such now happening) yet must finde a place in this discourse, not onely because some such have (as Embassadours extraordinary) been dispatcht heretofore upon some great errand (as the fearfull Eclipse at our Saviours death, the hailstones, mentioned *Foſh. 10.11.* so hugely exceeding the common standard of Nature, and perhaps the fiery sword which hung over Hierusalem, so long before its final desolation) but because our Adversaries are so prone to over-value such occasions, and to intitle an immediate hand of heaven to all such objects of wonder.

As for those stories (with which the Ethnick Legends abound) of the speaking of children out of their mothers wombs, the raining of stones, the speaking of oxen, their being found without hearts or livers when brought

to

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*Of the several kinds of Prodigies.*

to the Altars, Fountains running with (real) bloud for a long time together (which may seem to enter a fair plea for the honour of being marshalled under this head) I reject them all (with Tully) as fables and impostures, with which the world hath ever been abused (Rome-Pagan was as good at inventing stories of Prodigies and Apparitions of the gods, as Rome-Christian of Miracles and Apparitions of Saints) And with a like faith (though better affection, because found in a Poem) I receive many of those Portenia, which (as 'tis said) attended the fall of Cesar,

*simulachra miris pallentia modis,  
Visa sub obscurum noctis, pecudesque locutæ.  
Infandum, fistunt amnes, terræque debiscunt;  
Et mæstum illachrymat templis ebur, æraq; sonant.*

*Nec puteis manare crux cessavit.* Virg. Georg. I. 1.

Twas but proper for a Poet to hang the whole frame of Nature (as it were) with mourning and astonishment, upon the fall of so great a Person as Cesar was. Gods miracles carried majesty in those visible characters of Power, Greatness, Wisdom, stampt upon them; (they were never vain and ludicrous) and they came forth upon some errand of importance: like a broad seal they carried Majesty in their aspect, and came to derive credit and authority upon some matter of great weight and moment.

Secondly, There are a sort of Prodigies Penal (for I take the word in the latitude of its sence) such as are judgements upon Persons or Nations of a dreadfull and unusual figure and condition: sudden arrests by death; strange diseases, death by lightning, or the fall of a towre, unusual plagues, defeats of Armies at huge odds and disadvantages, murrain of cattel, very unseasonable years, &c.

These distinctions premised, I shall offer the best service I can, toward the deciphering of these dark characters of divine Providence; and make enquiry (in the order they now lie before us) into the intent and meaning of these new and unwonted occurrences. In which Essay, I shall assume the liberty (which I readily allow another) of advising freely with Reason, for we cannot (in this Argmment) take to any other Oracle to resolve us, if we intend to be wise to sobriety: It is but a just valuation of our selves, to let no vulgar notions commence our perswasions, before they have past the scrutiny of our Reason, and appear to merit our assent.

## Of Natural Prodigies.

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### CHAP. II.

#### Concerning Prodigies, Signal, Natural.

I Shall descend now to a close and distinct discourse concerning the (forementioned) Prodigies Signal; and amongst them, first concerning those which more immediately resolve into causes Natural: Concerning all which, I offer this general Thesis to proof. Prodigies Naturai are not intended, nor to be expounded the Prognosticks of judgments, suddenly to ensue upon whole Nations or particular persons. It is (especially) ignorance of their causes and ends which hath preferred some of these Natural Prodigies to so great a veneration and regard in many mens minds. As Ethnicism of old made the gods it worshipt, so ignorance oft makes the Furies it dreads.

Isa. 44. 15.

This Thesis I shall endeavour to perswade,

1. By some general Reasons and Arguments.
2. By a particular Induction and Survey of such as seem most plausibly pretended the silent Monitours of some approaching vengeance.

First, By some general Reasons.

### SECT. I.

#### Reasons to prove Prodigies Natural no Signs of a future judgement.

The first Argument taken from their doubtfull and uncertain indication; That proved from the confessions of their ablest Expositours; From their different Expositions in all times. The Interpreters of them banish the Jewish Common-wealth of old, upon this account, Philo. Thuanus. The Argument further urged from Tully. God's Signs express; The uselessness of those which are not.

2. From a consideration of the times wherein most attended to. The reason why a regard is to be had to the times and seasons; When Laws or Usages first obtained, noted from K. James. The times noted especially for gross ignorance in matters of Religion and Philosophy. Some Observations upon the remaining Registers of such accidents yet extant: The times remarked also for the publick fears and distractions happening in them. Livy. Seneca.
3. From the natural and necessary Causes of these things. More of Nature observable in a Prodigy, than common Occurrences.
4. From the Nature and temper of the Oeconomy we are now under.

The Argument which I shall first offer to reprehend the common vanity of receiving them as a kinde of indications in bodies Politick, is this: Their (pretended) indications are so hugely perplext, doubtfull

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Arg. i.

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full, and uncertain, that it cannot be concluded what judgement they portend, or when to ensue, or whether private persons or whole Nations be alarm'd by them.

If God do write *Edata hominum* in these mystick characters, there is none on earth found able to readē the writing, and (with any certainty) to make known the interpretation thereof. Most of their Expositours (like those upon Aristotle) are rather *Vates quam Interpretes*. Concerning that prodigious Comet which shone in our Hemisphere, Ann. 1618. one that pretended himself as much *Cælo à Conciliis* as other men, yet thus freely delivers himself, *Deum immortalem! quantò ille plures de se ferme Opiniones quam crines sparsit.* To a like purpose Tycho Brahe (discoursing de *Nova stella Cygni*, Ann. 1600.) *Decreta Phœnomenorum cœlitus illucsentium, ab iis qui artem astrologicam profitentur, præfigiri sat evidenti experimento, nequeunt.* but yet (so hard it is even for wise men to discard their *Opiniones*) as *Origen* calls them, Opinions brought with them, and woven into the very first contexture of their minds; he adds, *Non idcirco statuendum Dicimus Naturam talibus noviter formatis corporibus inaniter illudere, nihilque præfigii mundo ostendere;* as if they must needs be in vain, unless they assist presages (which yet no man is able to reach the certain knowledge of.)

A truth which the different purposes and significations to which these Prodigies have been (in all times) expounded, make faith of. In the more ancient times of the world, when they had their *Collegia vatum*, publick Professours of the Arts of Divination, by any unusual *Phœnomena* in Nature, we shall observe Earthquakes, Comets, Lightnings, &c. expounded sometimes *læta*, sometimes *sinistra Omina*: All these images (like some among the Papists) were made to look upon the people with a frown or a smile, according as the Priests of old (for State-reasons) were pleased to manage them by their subtle interpretations. Thus, in latter times, they have always (like bells) sounded to such a tune and fence, as the passengers phancy would impose upon them: That *pluvia purpurea*, bloudy rain (in the language of the Naturalists) falling at Bruxells, Ann. 1646 concerning the reason of which, there are extant the several judgements of Learned men, was (no doubt) received by timorous and softer phancies, as a presage of a bloudy war suddenly to ensue; whereas others owned it *tanquam Omen pacifici fœderis*, and a Signe that heaven would sooner rain bloud, then there should be any further effusion thereof on Earth or Sea, as the Poet expresseth himself upon that occasion,

*Fam sat is effusum terraque marique cruoris.*

*Ipsæ testantur quicquid pluit axis aquæ.*

Thus when the heart of Zwinglius (who was burnt, being found among the slain) was found intire in the ashes; when his body was consumed, his friends (from this Ordeel trial) concluded the stoutness and sincerity, but his adversaries the obdurate ness thereof. But the grave Historian makes a more sober gloss upon this providence, then either in those words *Adeo turbatis odio aut amore animas, ut fit religionis dissentionibus, pro se quisque omnia superstitione interpretatur;* Mens

Thuan. Obit.  
doct. vir. Ann.  
1531.

Mens minds disturbed with love or hatred (as it falls out in religious differences) each party superstitiously interprets all accidents in favour of it self.

In the interim we may safely infer the vanity of trusting much to these Prodigies, which ( like mercenary soldiers ) may be easily brought to fight on either side in any case. Accordingly Philo tells us, that the law of Moses banisht from the Jewish Nation πονητες, περισκοπετες, all the observers of birds; and regarders of Prodigies, because these Diviners were led but by specious and plausible conjectures, entertained different phancies of the same things, both because their subjects had no steady and fixt Nature, and themselves were unprovided of any sure Maximes, by which to measure and prove the conceits of their own minds in reference to them.

Can it now be reasonably imagined, God ( all whose ways are judgement ) ever intended these portentous occurrences as his trumpets to alarm a drowsie world, which give forth ουσιαν φωνην so obscure and uncertain a sound ? Can it possibly be presumed, that any thing is there signified where nothing ever was or will be certainly understood ? If these be the signs of the gods ( said Tully, discoursing upon this argument ) why have they always been so dark and obscure ? for if they come forth that we might understand things future, they ought to declare them more openly and plainly; aut ne occulte quidem, si ea sciri nolebant, or not so much as darkly, if they would not have them understood. Did God ever in all the Scripture, foretel an evil by any such winding and squint-ey'd Oracles as the Old Serpent made use of, which used to work men to some confused and pannick fears, or to enshare them while seeming to warn them ? When he spake to Egypt by בְּנֵי אֹהֶן the words of his signs, Psa. 105. 27. they were such as were clearly expressive of his minde and purpose, they were such as ( like arrows shot into a Town with letters bound about them ) did bear upon them their own signification, and gave very intelligible intimations of their end and intention ; whereas all these signes, as commonly reputed, give forth no certain notices of the events they point unto ; For they are not Hieroglyphicks of the judgements ( as bearing no likeness and resemblance of them ) no effective causes of them, nor yet did Scripture ( a consideration instead of all arguments ) ever warrant us to receive any of them with those religious and awfull regards which are owing to the Monitors of the Divine displeasure, which certainly it would have done, had the honour of God and the good of men been so hugely concerned in them, as some would have us to imagine.

Secondly, The times wherein these Prodigies have been received with their first and most religious regards, were such as sufficiently lessen their repute with all persons that use not to trust their faith without some security. Excellent that speech of K. James, A good Crisis of a President or cū exemplo, tempora spectanda sunt quando primū res cœpta : in quibus si vel confusio regnaret vel inscilia derogat illud limprimis autoritati rerum, atque omnia reddit suspecta. Cited by L. Bacon: Aug. Scient. l. 2. præsat. ad hanc l. 2. q. 2.

Στοχαστι  
παιδεις στοι  
πιλαρων ρη  
εκπτων αλ-  
λοτε αλλας  
λητο των αινιγ-  
φαντοτης,  
λαμπαροτες,  
δια το μητε  
την επονειαν  
φυσιν εχειν  
παιγνιον, μητε  
την διαβολας  
ακριβην επα-  
νον φειπτο.  
Ειδης η Γαρυν-  
θοεται τη  
δοκιμα. I. de  
Monarc.

I Cor. 14.8.:  
Tul. de Divin.  
l. 2.  
Quæ est ista  
(uti creditur)  
a Diis profecta  
significatio,  
& quasi de-  
nunciatio  
cabamitatum?  
quæ volunt  
Dii Immorta-  
les & primū  
ea significan-  
tes quæ sine  
interpretibus  
non possumus  
intelligere,  
deinde ea quæ  
cavere neque-  
amus? Id. ib.  
In omni con-  
suetudine vel

stom may be made by an attendance to the condition of the times wherein they first obtained, which if remarkable; either for the ignorance or confusions of them, they greatly render the things to suspicion and challenge, which received their first birth and original in them. Now then if (as the Astrologers use) we calculate the Nativitiy of this Opinion of Prodigies, we shall finde nothing promised and signified to oblige our affections, because (as truth obtains most in times of great knowledge and peace, when we have most ability and leisure to judge, so) the times wherein this first and principally prevailed, stand blemisht with these two great evils, *Ignorance* and *Distraction*.

First, They were times of greatest ignorance both in matters of Religion and Learning.

1. In matters of Religion, who more critically observant of all such unusual accidents, then the Heathen who knew not God? whose whole Religion (in the practice of it) was but a System of ridiculous, obscene, and inhumane rites; and (in the speculation thereof) but an endless observation of Omens, and prodigies, and a pretended skill of interpreting dreams and strange accidents. It was among the Egyptians (as we learn from Strabo) a great instance of Religion, *ἀναρέψεις τὰ ιερά γεγονότα* to enter into their sacred records all the Errata Nature; and (perhaps in an imitation of them) the Romans kept their annual Registers of the several anomalous occurrences in the world; some fragments of which have reacht our own times; Upon a deliberate perusal whereof, four things (not unserviceable to our general Discourse) offer themselves to our observation.

1. That the Events succeeding them were as often happy, as unfortunate: the truth whereof the curious Reader may soon resolve himself of by a short survey.

2. That they generally concluded in superstition; the people being readily wrought on to institute *novas Ferias*, to consecrate new Temples to the gods, to institute new Rites, *expiare prodigia, & procurare monstra* (as their phrase was) to divert the unlucky Omen.

3. That there hardly passeth a year or two in that Register, wherein there are not recorded several of these *Portenta*.

4. That a vain opinion of these things held the people under a perpetual pedagogy to base and ignoble fears of God, and impendent evils.

Upon which accounts, I do more then incline to beleeve, that the devil (who hath the posse aeris at his command) did often (by divine permission) procure many strange impressions on Nature, thereby to fright those to his altars, which he could never perswade; and to subdue the minds of men to (his own image) a perpetual fear and trembling before the fense of a Deity. But God (who useth to make the devils mines to fall in upon himself) made (no doubt) this happy use of these slavish fears in the minds of the Gentiles, even the ushering in of the Gospel Jubilee with the greater acceptance among them; as by the fears & terrors of the Law, he also levelled the way to its more ready and cheerful reception among the Jews. But to return,

Secondly,

*Vide Liv.  
Hist. l.22.1.  
& 32.1.*

*Vide Liv.*

*Hist. l.22.1.*

*& 32.1.*

Secondly, As ignorant were the times in Philosophy, as Religion; perfect strangers to the Reasons of things: for (as it is well observed) as the knowledge of the natural causes of Earthquakes, Eclipses, Lightnings, Meteors, &c. obtained amongst the Gentiles of old, so all their ominous fears, their *libri fulgurales*, interpretations of prodigies, fell into contempt and disrepute: the more men advanc't into the light, the less apt were they to start. They then began to smile at their former superstitions, as men in the day laugh at those dreams and visions which frightened them in the night.

Besides (secondly) they were *Times of publick fears, troubles, confusions* (generally) when men were most impressive to a fear of these prodigious accidents. Thus Livy somewhere notes, *turbido aliquo tempore, versis in Religionem animis, multa visa creditaque prodigia quæ non erant*; and elsewhere tells us, (*Hist. l. 28. ii.*) *In civitate, tanto discrimine belli sollicita, quum Omnium secundorum aduersorumque causas in Deos verterent, multa prodigia nunciabantur.*

Men, when they think God displeased, (as they deal by a man they conceive their adversary) look upon all his actions through the black medium of suspicion and jealousie, and therefore they all seem to carry terours and affrightments with them. All strange Accidents (like strange passengers) in times of discomposure are suspected and examined, which freely pass without our notices when peace and love spread their gentle wings over a nation; when fear hath once tinctured the eye of the minde with black (dreadfull) apprehensions, it easily sees every thing of its own colour: it either finds its object, or creates it in every occurrence; the sun shines not upon the water or a cloud, but (like the Moabites) men conclude signs of bloud from the redness of the colour, when fear hath once softned the spirits, and disabled the minde for a cool and sedate judgement and valuation of things. Besides, in such times, Religion knows not to keep its mean, but quickly runs over into superstition (a servile flattery of God, and an observance of him in little, weak, feminine instances of devotion.)

Now the Religion of Prodigies being conceived thus in the womb of gross ignorance, and nourish't by the soft and easie fears of men in affliction; when their fancy (like mettal in the fire) refuseth no figure, we cannot entertain any great Opinion of its strength and goodness without a forfeiture of our credit, with more considerate and serious persons. Can it be ever thought that God should advance an observation of these things into so necessary a part of our Religion, and dopt it a great instance of our regards of his superintendence, and presidency over the affairs of the world, when (we see) the devil made choice of it to entertain the devouter fears of his Votaries with all? Did God ever take sacrifice from the devils altars? The devil (indeed) hath alway been Gods ape, but God will alway be found the devils opposite, and to tread counter to him perpetually. Many of the critical rites and usages appointed the Jewish Nation, will be found to resolve into the divine purpose to cross and thwart (by his commands) the rites of the Zabii, the Egyptians, and other neighbouring

boiling Nations, which had the devil for the Great Master of their (religious) Ceremonies. When our Saviour came into the world, the Religion of the greatest part of it (through the agency of the devil) ran out into a multitude of little rites, weak observances, bodily postures; and he appoints a Religion (directly opposite) plain, simple, rational, life and spirit, whose main desigine was to employ and perfect the minde and spirit of a man. And can it be thought that heaven and hell now touch each other so far, that we must borrow the measures of our biggest fears and hopes, and motives to Repentance, from the Ethnick Divinity? (in which if there had been *aliquid sani*, to be sure the devil would have hindred its gaining so great a regard as it did among his Votaries) must we now look for such a Jewel as the intimations of the counsels of infinite Wisdom are, in the dunghill of obscene and monstrous births, apparitions of lying spirits, strange voices in the air, mighty winds, alterations in the face of heaven, &c. from which the Gentiles in the times of their ignorance (to be-nighted men rotten wood shines) thought to receive the light of some heavenly counsel and direction.

*Arg. 3.* Thirdly, *Prodigies Natural*, are not to be regarded as Prognosticks of Events arbitrary, even because they are *Natural*, [are owing to as necessary causes in Nature as the more common and easie productions am, qui illi thereof] no need to call in the extraordinary assistances of heaven non putat ali- to solve these unusual *Phænomena*, for as Nature is but a constant and quando licere, durable Prodigy, so a Prodigy but a more rare and unusual Nature (as nisi quod səpi- hath been shewn by many Writers, to which I remit the capable us facit. Sen. Reader.)

*Nay* (upon a due judgement of things) there will perhaps appear more of *Nature* in a Prodigy, than in the more harmonious consort of Uniform Agents, to which common usage hath appropriated that name; That *Nature* in its production of the several kinds of creatures, should (as if they were all stamp'd with one common seal) give them forth in such equal and similar figures and proportions, is a more just object of wonder, than to see the natural *Archeus* sometimes to play the bungler, and to leave its work (in some parts thereof) rude and misshapen. That the Earth should generally be delivered of the many vapours and winds within its bowels, without the pangs and throws of an earthquake; and that all the host of Heaven should march every one on his way, and not break their ranks, neither thrust one another, but walk every one on his path (to borrow the language of the Prophet) are prodigies beyond an Earthquake, New star, or monster sometime discovered to the world, and therefore more justly chosen to be the constant instances of the divine Wisdom and Power; and to see some strange fires breaking forth (sometimes) from the caverns of the earth, is so much beneath wonder, that *Pliny* tells us, it exceeds all wonder, that there shoule be any day wherein all the things in the world (so pregnant with fiery principles) do not break forth into one mighty flame, and lay the world in ashes.

*Exedit pro-  
fecto omnia  
miracula, ul-  
tum diem fu-  
isse in quo non  
cuncta confa-  
grarent. Plin.  
Hist. Nat.  
l. 2. c. 107.*

Now then what sober Reason can warrant us to conclude any necessary and natural occurrences the prophetick signs of Events (to us)

us) purely arbitrary (and contingent ? Either all such irregular accidents shall be allow'd presages of future judgements; and then every Nation will become a Magor Missabib, and (what was threaten'd upon the Jews) our lives shall alway hang in doubt before us, we shall then fear night and day, and have no assurance, (at least, no comfort,) of our lives: or else some onely of these Prodigious Events shall be so acknowledg'd; but then, at whose feet must we sit to learn which are onely the Interpreters of the power of Nature, and which are Διός ἀγέλαιοι, Gods messengers to proclaim to a Nation that the days of its visitation are approaching?.. Certainly signs of judgments extraordinary, must themselves be such, they must (as the Prophet Isai 44.9. speaks in another case) be their own witnesses; and (like Heralds which proclaim war) bear upon them (if possible) that badge and cognizance whereby their office may be known, all may understand to what end and purpose they come forth from God: We find in Scripture, that Gods real signs were generally great and mighty, transcendent to the powers and possibilites of Natural Agents, that it might appear his power was greatly concern'd in them, and that they came forth upon a greater purpose then the bare service of the laws of Nature, and the powers of some second Causes. Exod. 7.3,4. Fourthly, The condition and temper of the Oeconomy we are now Under 1 King.18. admits not our expectation of any signs from heaven, either to witness against 24. the practices or opinions of any party of men, or to give notice of an approaching mercy or judgement 1 to all which purposes they ministred heretofore; 2 King. 20.9. Luke 21. 25.

God was pleas'd heretofore (suitably) to the manager of the Church to address himself very much to the lower faculties of the Soul, (Phancy and imagination;) accordingly we finde Prophecies deliver'd in vehement and unusual schemes of speech, such as are apt greatly to strike and affect upon imagination; Christ was promis'd (as one speaks) sub magnificis & admirationem facientibus ideis, the mysteries of the Gospel were held forth in most splendid types and symbols, and the law of God forc't upon the spirits of men heretofore by the terrors of a thundering heaven and a burning mountain, and a speedy Vengeance upon the despisers thereof, the spirits of good men carried out to actions and tempers beyond their natural capacities, by the pregnant and vigorous impresses of the divine Spirit, and the fears of the Church excited, and her faith assisted by mighty signs and wonders, (the withdrawing whereof the Church bewayls, they all vanishing as the light of divine Revelation, prevail'd, as stars doe upon the approaches of day-light.) Heb. 12. 8.

But they which talk of and look for any such vehement expressions of Divinity now, mistake the temper & condition of that Oeconomy which the appearance of our Saviour hath now put us under; wherein all things are to be managed in a more sedate, cool, and silent manner, in a way suited to, and expressive of the temper our Saviour discover'd in the world, Who caused not his voice to be heard in the streets; and to the condition of a Reasonable Being made to be manag'd by steady and calm arguments, and the words of Wisdom heard in quiet Eccles. 9.17.

Mat. 16. 1.

heard in quiet [in a smooth and serene temper;] the mysteries of the Gospel come forth cloth'd in sedate and intelligible forms of speech; the minds of men are not now drawn into ecstasie by any such vehement and great examples of Divine Power and Justice as attended the lower and more servile state of the World. The miracles our Saviour wrought were of a calm and gentle nature [curing the blinde, restoring the sicke and lame, not causing of thunder and storms, as Samuel, but appeasing them] none of them such as the Jews call'd for, *ονυματα εν τας εργασιας*, signs from heaven, such prodigious and affrighting thunders and fires which attended the delivery of the law and the spirit of Elijah. Indeed the *Veil of the Temple was rent*, the Sun dreadfully eclypst, the Earth terribly shaken at his death; but these astonishing wonders were made use of as his last reserve to conquer the prejudices of an obdurate people, upon whom his more gentle and obliging instances of Divine Majesty made no impression: and perhaps these prodigious changes in Nature were intended as prophetick emblems of the great change shortly to ensue in heaven [the way of worship and religion] and Earth [the powers and Kingdoms of the World] by the power and Doctrine of that Person who then died upon the Cross.

Heb. 12.

26, 27.

Mat. 23.14.

That mighty rushing Wind at Pentecost which was issu'd in a soft and lambent fire upon the heads of the first Preachers of the Gospel, was possibly a figure of that more vehement and terrible State of the law, which usher'd the way for and determin'd in the more sedate and gentle dispensation of the Gospel. God hath now (in a great measure) left frightening of men to heaven by visible terrors: the law of the *Messias* was deliver'd upon the mount in the small and still voice; and is set home upon the hearts of men by the terror only of a *πειστησιν θεου*; a more heavy vengeance in another World, than what overtook the despisers of Moses law: God expects now that we should be judiciously religious, and act to his service by a *Spirit of love and of a sound minde*, to fear his threatenings more then the burnings of Sinai, to look upon a bad man (since the appearance of Christ to take away sin) as the greatest Prodigy, and to expect the signs of an approaching judgment *non in Erratis Naturae, sed saceruli.*

Thus have I endeavour'd the proof of the Thesis propos'd, by some general Reasons and Arguments: Others there are of as great moment, which (that I overlay not the Readers patience) shall be reserv'd as so many nerves and sinews to run through, and hold together the main body of the ensuing Discourse.

## SECT. II.

Some Particular Prodigies prov'd no signs of ensuing Evils.

Comets commonly thought presages of evils, and why. A difference between comets and some luminous bodies in the Heavens like them, Prov'd not to be signa operantia of any evils in Earth. The difficulty of determining the specifick Nature of a Comet, prov'd no incenſt exhalation by 4 Considerations: further evinc't no effective cause of evil, from the dimension and the acknowledg'd altitude thereof. Three Arguments to prove them not to be Signa indicantia of any evils. The difficulty of reprehending any errore which bottomes in phancy and imagination. The Omission of a particular discourse concerning some other Prodigies, excus'd.

That which the law of our intended method lays next before us, is the proof of the Thesis propos'd by a particular Induction. I shall therefore direct my thoughts upon some, (twere to overvalue the Argument to speak to many) Prodigies, which have been thought the most plausible pretenders to the honour of being *symbola Prophetica*: Amongst which Comets are of more especial regard, and have been receiv'd (by the faith or fears of most times) as a kind of Beacon fir'd from Heaven to alarm the World, and to give intimation of an approaching evil: The *Cauda Cometae* especially seems to the eye of ignorance the emblem of a Flaming sword, or fiery rod, and to carry the dreadfull images of some mighty scourge prepar'd to correct a foward world withall. With the Poet it passeth as a rul'd case,

— *Nunquam cœlo spectatum impunè Cometam.*

A comet never shone from Heaven to give the world any pannick fears. The Astrologers (as confident of the final as the Peripatetics of the formal cause, of any such unusual lights) take themselves upon the appearance of them to be the *Filiæ cœnaculi* which are to expound to the world these mystick characters of Heaven. Indeed any alteration and unwonted wrinkle in the face of heaven, is thought (like a frown) a presage of anger and some intended evil, partly because Heaven is conceiv'd the throne of justice whence 'tis most proper to expect the signs of Vengeance, but especially because the general harmony of its motions and constancy of its parts (whereby it reproacheth the Lunacies and irregularities of this lower world) seem to assure that Anomalies at any time therein cannot issue *ex natura subjecti*, sed *Consilio Dei*, from the nature of the subject, but the wise purpose of God (by these) to warn before he strike, and (as by a flaming sword) to drive the world out of its fool's paradise, (a flattering peace and security).

To encounter the vanity of so specious and obstinate an imagination, I shall endeavour to evince these strange Phenomena in Hea-

ven, no Prognosticks of any ensuing evils, as being neither the *signa operantia*, nor yet the *signa indicantia* of them. Only I must (before I proceed) tell the Reader that by Comets, I mean Comets (truly so called) not those (*Cometo-eisū*, as a more accurate regard to Nature hath of late taught men to distinguish) fiery and luminous appearances in the elementary region which onely ape and resemble them; but such luminous bodies which are carri'd with a kinde of regular and uniform motion, and extend their continuance oft to the space of many weeks or months: and so seem a kinde of *Participia Naturæ*, partaking of the light and motion of a Planet, and of the vanishing Nature of a Meteor. Now to our business.

First, Comets are not to be own'd the *signa Operantia*, the effective signs of any evils ensuing: for thus 'tis vulgarly concluded, upon this presumption, that they are a kinde of hot and sulphureous exhalations, set on fire, which (as 'twere the feaver of Nature) prey upon the *humidum*, the moysture of it, and so suddenly dry and exhaust it: whence ensue great droughts, dearths, famines, pestilences: and by intending the heat of the air they are thought to encline to feavers, to promote choler in Princes and Nations, and so to lay that fuel in men, which will soon break forth into the flames of publick Wars and confusions.

*Miraculum Naturæ Cometa, idoneum ingenii nostris torquendis, quod admirari debemus, cognoscere nunquam Poterimus.* Fien. de Comet. p. 18.

*Res perplexissima est & omnem fere conatum eludit.* From. de Com. l. 3. c. 2. A. 7  
*Nobis rimari illa & conjectura ire in occulta, tantum licet,*  
nec cum fiducia inventi, nec fine spe.

Sen. de. Co-  
met. log.  
Nat. 2. l. 7. C. 29.

The Reasons I shall tender to perswade the contrary shall not be many because I designe not a triumph but a victory, and would not that this part should swell beyond the just measures and proportions: I shall content my self with some few taken from this threefold Topick. The *Nature*, the *Dimensions*, the *Altitude* of a Comet.

1. I argue it to be no *Operative signe of evil in this lower world*, from the *General Nature* thereof. As for its more specifick and distinct *Nature*, it is that which many Philosophers have shot their bolt at, but it is hard to say (at this distance) who hath hit the mark. Enquiries about heavenly bodies usually conclude in wonder and doubt: Accordingly (in this argument) we shall finde all sorts of Philosophers (ancient and modern) profess themselves unresolv'd, and modest, but onely the avow'd Followers of *Aristotle*, whose usage is (too often) in *Divinity* to make a great deal of nothing; and in *Philosophy*, nothing of a great deal. We fell from God by reaching after the knowledge of things too high for us, and 'tis a mercifull justice that we should be humbled into a sense of our sin and ignorance by our being pos'd in those things which we most converse with, or are most desirous to understand. However those notices we can arrive to of the *General Nature* of a Comet, will sufficienly serve the reprehension of that vulgar conceit now before our consideration [that 'tis *Mali Praeco*]. For it appears to us in an evidence as great as the matter will bear, 1. That a Comet is no exhalation set on fire; (the great hinge which the Opinion turns upon) 2. That it is a kind of heavenly body.

First, It is no exhalation incensit. This may appear first from the constant equality and evenness of its light and figures, the main body of a Comet is observ'd to maintain an even and constant rotundity, and to

to send forth a direct and uniform ray of light in the tayl or train thereof: whereas if it were a fire, it would shift its figures according as the necessity of that *Pabulum* whereby it is maintain'd, did require; and would appear greater or less according as it had more or less subdu'd and prevail'd upon the matter which it spent its force upon. Besides Comets as they are (like the Planets) in their motion, a kind of *stella erratica*, so also like them in the Nature and quality of their light; they do not *scintillare*, and provoke the eye to more intense notices by any new and uneven vibrations of light, whereas fire sparkles, and is alway in (either direct or circular) motions.

2. From the clear and constant visibility of them. Nothing checkes and intercepts our full and free view of an appearing Comet, but (what may allo obscure the sun) the interpose of a cloud. Whereas were they incenſt exhalations (of such vast dimensions) a Comet must necessarily carry its own Earth about with it to eclipse it sometimes from our sight, because it is suppos'd (like a torch) in the pursuit of its *pabulum* to burn downward, (though it be apparent that Comets extinguish and become invisible by moving higher into the Heavens) because the more gross and uninflamed parts must sometimes needs interupt our sight of that fire which hath ceas'd the parts which lye next the sun, or the (suppos'd) elementary fire, which the vulgar doctrine asserts the occasion of these prodigious fires in heaven.

3. From the Uniformity and steadiness of their motions. Comets *Nullis ignis* though not all subject to one and the same law of motion (because *bus ordinariis* obſerv'd indifferent in their motions to any quarter of Heaven) yet *& cœlestibus* are all noted to proceed with a very great constancy and uniformity, *iter flexum* to describe exactly a segment of a great circle, and not to be acted to *est, sideris* any such giddy and casual courses, as fire, which is (in the elemen- *proprium est* tary Region) determin'd by the air, or the circumstances of the *ducere orbem*. matter which feeds, it which way it shall move and incline it self. Sen. Nat.

4. And lastly, From the dimensions of a Comet. Tycho measur'd in the quest. l. 7. de tayl or train of his Comet. An 1577. ninety six semidia miters of Comet. c. 23. the earth; and some astronomers found in the beard of that which Vid. From shone An. 1618. the extent of 382700. German miles; (in short) Met. l. 3. if we trust the measures of Astronomy, they have been oft found to c. 4. A. 7. exceed the proportions of the Earth: Now it seems greatly improbable that so vast a body of vapours should be drawn together so long and so high, nay impossible; the whole earth (if but one vast exhalation) being insufficient for its make and supply. Its here return'd, that it were indeed impossible, if the body of a Comet were solely of a spherical figure; but a Comet (say our adversaries) may be expanded to a plain, like a cloud, and so maintain the opinion of its dimensions: To which we answer, that although in some position, a plain figure may give the shew and appearance of a Comet, yet it cannot in every motion and site and every position of Beholders, unless it be of a spherical figure.

I proceed next to a more positive description of the Nature of a  
D 2 Comet,

Comet, by proving it to be some heavenly body. What kinde of heavenly body it is, is as difficult as unnecessary in this place largely to define. That such a one it is, was a truth credited by the joyn't suffrages of the more Ancient Philosophers. Aristotle seems the first, who presum'd against the sense of Antiquity to degrade Comets from heaven to the degree and place of meteors, set on fire by his *ignis elementaris*. He had one Philosophy *pro Musæis* and another *pro Scholis*, which latter, (because recommended to the Populacy) his chief care was to make (like reeds and canes) generally smooth and facile in the surface (onely interposing here and there a few knots to exercise the subtler sort of his auditors) not much caring though it were hollow, and fill'd out with little besides very words and easy speculations, beyond which the most never take care to search and enquire.

*Cometas cœlestes esse à Mathematicis, præsertim Tychoe & Keplerio, nuper sic probatum ut pudeat non credere.*  
Id. c. i.  
Art. i.

Largely to endeavour the proof of this truth, would be to undervalue the pains of more able Undertakers in this argument, and to over-doe the end to which this discourse is leveil'd. In short, (to omit the consideration of its rise and setting) the Parallax of a Comet is found much less than that of the moon; which gives the most undoubted report of its exceeding it in Altitude. Besides if it were not much above our Atmosphærē (which exceeds not the distance of fourscore miles) its *arcus apparentia* would be so strait and inconsiderable that (as hath been prov'd) it would in two or three hours quite run out of the compass of our sensible Horizon, nor possibly continue so long together visible to us as Comets are generally known to doe.

Our second Argument to evince that no evil in this lower world, owes it self to the malign aspects of a Comet, is taken from the dimensions thereof. It seems (in the body of it) scarce equal to the dimensions of a star of the first magnitude: the truth is, *pars minima est ipse Cometa sibi*, the true and real Comet is the least part of its appearing self, in regard the tayle thereof is not *œsaur*. sed *œuœœis*, not any real and substantial part thereof (as commonly presum'd) flaming forth as the condition of the matter doth invite the fire to follow, but the shining of the solar beams through the more porous and spungy parts of the head thereof (some imitation whereof, we sometimes have in the beams of the setting sun darted through a dispos'd cloud, or through some small crevise in a wall, which (after the figure of a rod) first close and knit together, and then spread and dilate themselves according as they advance further from the *angustia* of the matter whereat they enter (for its observ'd that still as the Sun circles in its diurnal motion in the heavens, so doth a Comets tayle veere, and respect an opposite poynt in the heavens) so that these mighty vibrations of light from its luminous body, put a great fallacy upon the eye, and report it much larger then in truth, it is. Now then can it be presum'd by any man that will ow any account of his Opinions to Reason, that (in it self) so small a body, at so vast a distance, lasting so inconsiderable a time and moving so fast away, can be sufficient for any such notable effects as some easy men in-

title

title it unto? What History (almost) is there of Comets but what arrives at us stain'd and defil'd by the superstition of the writers, able to support the confidence of this perswasion? How little able are we, after the observation of so many hundred years to assigne the effects of the most noted stars in heaven, except the Sun and Moon?

3. Our last Argument was taken from the *acknowledg'd altitude of these unwonted appearances*. They which marshal them in the lowest place, assign them very near the orb of fire: Now how weak & feeble an impression can a few exhalations kindled at so vast a distance make upon this lower world? especially considering there is the middle region interpos'd, by its coldness fitted to temper and qualify the heated and exciccate ayr, before it mingle with that which we here breath in. Besides how little able are those weaker impressions upon the ayr, to stand before those more sensible and vigorous alterations which the succeeding seasons of the year continually make upon it? The Opinion which asserts Comets to be incens'd exhalations would carry (in my eye) more fair appearances of truth, if owing them rather the presages of seasons healthfull, and desireable, in regard it supposeth so many noxious and impure exhalations consum'd (at so vast a distance from Earth) by fire, the most potent corrective of an infectious ayr.

These Reasons seem sufficient to reach the proof of our first assertion [that Comets are not *signa operativa malorum*] I am next to prove them not to be *signa indicantia* of them which I shall endeavour *From the indifference and Universality of their aspects and motions*. They often pass over the heads of many and different Countries, that in 1618. was successively vertical to Arabia, Persia, Turkey, Barbary, Morocco, China, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Muscovie, &c. now which of these can it be presum'd to level its malign aspects at? Which of these was most concern'd in its presages? surely none of them. But as *the Sun and Moon* being design'd to declare the glory of God to the world, their line therefore is gone forth through all the Earth, so (possibly) God intending these wonderfull appearances in heaven, not so much the monitours of his anger, as of his glory, would have them thus Catholick in their motions, and shew themselves to such variety of people and languages.

Psal. 19. 4.

(2) I argue against them from the *aiery weakness* of that foundation, the art of presaging by them is bottom'd upon; which we may take in the words of a Great master in all curious arts. *Portendunt Cometæ juxta Saturnum pestes & prodiciones, & sterilitatem; Circa Jovem, legum mutationem, mortem Pontificum; juxta Martem, bella; juxta Solem, toti orbi magnam cladem; juxta Lunam magnas inundationes, aliquando flicitates, &c. juxta Coronam & in Tropicis Aequinoctiisque, Regum interitum, &c.* the cracks and flaws of which discourse appear so wide and visible, that 'tis needless to strike it with any Reason, to make a more full discovery of them. The Astrologers (like children) set up in their soft imagination, some phantastical images of things, and then fear them as if they were great realities. Very follicitous they have ever appear'd, to lengthen their cords, (to draw all kind of

Cardan. l. 14.

De rer. var.

c. 70.

Persons and Events, within the lines and limits of their art) but very careless to strengthen their stake (to borrow the expression of the Prophet) to ratifie and make good the Principles upon which they do proceed. All the images they speak of in Heaven, and the significations apply'd to them, ow all their credit solely to the courtesie of imagination.

*Multi sunt à nobis vissi Cometæ, quos nulla uspiam totâ in Europa subsecuta est pernicies mortalium, & multi clarissimi viri suo fato functi sunt, multi eversi principatus, pessundatae familiæ illusterrimæ, sine ullo Cometæ præ sagio. Scal. exerc. 79. §. 11.*

*Natur. Quæ. I. 7. c. 17.*

*Pusilla res mundus est, nisi in illo, quod querat omnis mun dus, habeat. Sen.*

3. From the contradiction of Experience. How many sore evils hath the world travailed under, which were never signified by any fore-going Comet? (sometimes not happening for many years together) and how many Comets have there happened (sometimes) in a short compass, not seconded by any notable alterations in the places, to which they seem'd especially to have respect? Commendable herein is the diligence of Gemma Frisius in taking notice of as many good as bad events consequent to the appearance of them. Particularly so happy was that Comet which happened under Nero, that Seneca tells us, *Cometis detraxit infamiam*, it cleared the credit of Comets, and brought them into good thoughts. They seem indeed the presages of approaching evils, either because their Interpreters are so well advis'd as to assign them a competent period of time to produce their effects in, and to take in whole kingdoms as the scene to act their Tragedies upon, and commonly put into their Almanack, onely *dies nefastos*, days markt with some black and sad accidents (which we naturally retain a very quick sense and remembrance of) after the appearance of them ; or else the world would appear to treat its inhabitants with as much courtesie after, as before the appearance of a Comet.

The Opinion I now contest, is so receptive of Argument against it, that there is the less need of any to press it further, especially considering the great Advocates thereof are so much under the command of a mighty imagination, which delights in *conjugates* and *parallels*, and *symbolizing instances*, so much that it usually makes them or findes them in Nature. Now we shall ever finde, that all persons which take up opinions from their own Poetical Genius and busie phansie, are impregnable to all the assaults of reason : the Rosy-Crucians acted so hugely by imagination in Philosophy, some kinde of Chymists in Medicks, the Cabalists in Scripture-expositions, Enthusiasts in Religion, Figure-casters in Astrology, are so invincibly resolved upon their hypotheses, that (like him in the story) when their hands, those little reasonings wherewith they hold them, are cut off, they will *mordicus defendere*, hold them with their teeth, biting and reviling language, thrown upon their opposers and neglecters. They are entertained with pleasant and easie dreams, and therefore are angry with those which attempt to awaken and discompose them. As for our selves, let us be content rather to sit down in the darkness of an humble ignorance, then to follow an *ignis fatuus*, the pretending light of Divination by a Comet, which leads but to the bog and precipice of a superstitious fear and an abused minde : God hath sealed up the Natures and ends of some things in the world in a *διῖον σκόπος*, to hide pride from man : He will have some mysteries in every science past our

our search, to assure us, that there is one *First Minde*, from whom these depths came forth, and who can fathom and comprehend them all. I have nothing further to superadd in this Argument but this: There are some unusual appearances in this Elementary Region, the last endeavours of fire to imitate and copy out the glories of the celestial Region, upon which the common suffrage of Philosophers hath bestowed the title of Comets, because they seem to touch one another in some similar properties of light, bigness, continuance, upon which I shall bestow a few words upon a more proper occasion.

This part of the main body of my Argument, concerning Comets, exceeding thus its just measures and proportions, must necessarily starve and shrink those which (in my first thoughts) grew next unto it [concerning Earthquakes, the apparition of two or thre Suns at once, and monstrous productions] for, to redeem my former prolixity, I shall choose to speak to them sparsim, as the necessary returns of the argument shall give occasion: Adding in this onely concerning births, which go off from the common figures of their kinds, that as the assistance of God the Spirit, with our holy endeavours, doth not take away the *ἀναρτήματα τοξείων*, the weaknesses attendant on Christian practice, because he acts us *ad modum nostrum*; so, neither doth the co-assistance of God the Father with all Natural Agents, quite remove the *ἀναρτήματα φύσεων*, the errors of Nature, all things being assisted according to their proper measures, powers and capacities, and with due regard to the Laws of action appointed to some other intervening second causes, which perhaps we have no knowledge of, or attend not much unto.

### S E C T. III.

#### *An Answer to the Objections against the precedent Discourse.*

The first Objection taken from the common sence and perswasion of men proposed. Some general answers returned unto it. An enquiry made into the reasons of it, and resolved. 1. Into an ignorance of causes. Ignorance noted to beget confidence in the head, and diffidence in the heart. 2. Into guilt, quickly awakened into a fear of an approaching evil, and why. 3. The application of a humane measure to the divine actings. The commonness and evil of this usage noted in Philosophy and Divinity. 4. A great propensity in men to close with any flattering medium to arrive at the knowledge of things future. This noted in all Nations, some account given thereof. 5. The Agency of the devil. The advantages this perswasion gives him. His designe to work base and servile fears in men, noted. 6. The authority of a traditional superstition. Prodigies observed in our times, observed in former. 7. The private opinions of some contemplative persons, inclining to this perswasion. Some of them toucht upon. 8. The Nature of the soul, greatly impressive to a conceit of parallels, equalities, and similitudes in the Government of the world. Strange judgements and changes

ges in earth, described by Poets and Prophets usually, by some mighty changes in Nature. 9 The Natural aptness of the soul to entertain things vehement and extraordinary, with great Opinions. Arguments from general consent, when considerable.

**B**efore we can have peaceable possession of the truth, for which so much evidence of Reason hath been given in, it will be necessary to remove those Objections with which our title thereunto is a little incumbered. Now these are taken from a five-fold Topick.

1. From the common sense and perswasion of men.
2. The authority and Testimony of Learned Writers.
3. The attestation of common Experience.
4. The seeming evidence of Reason.
5. The Testimony of Sacred Writ.

The four former have weight enough to incline the scale the other way, the latter seems to weigh it quite down.

Objct. 1.

First, *We are urged with the common sense and perswasion of the world in all ages.* He that hath but lookt into the Histories of times past, shall readily observe all Ages greatly propense to observe Natures strayings from her more usual law and rule of operation, and to entertain all strange occurrences with a kinde of Prophetick fear of some great evils impendent, of which they are presumed but the harbingers and *Præcones*. And surely this alone might serve sufficiently to vindicate the observation of Prodigies, at least, from all suspicion of vanity and superstition.

Answe.

To deal plainly, there is more of truth in this Objection, then I could wish there were; to which to return; *Magister Errorum Populus*, and that 'tis the office of Learning not to lead us to the multitude but from it; and that a wise man is the greatest of Prodigies, would be thought but the best of evasions and the worst of Answers: Though a wiser man then my self, when prest with the same Objection in a like case: [ *Atomnes Populi, Nationes, utuntur Auspiciis, &c.* ] judg'd it beneath any better answer, then this, *Quasi verò quidquam sit tam valde, quam nihil sapere, vulgare.* I shall choose rather to enquire into the grounds and reasons of this so Catholick a perswasion; for truth is best strengthned, and error refuted, *per reductionem ad principia*, by calling men to a view of those principles and grounds from which they grow, and into which they finally do resolve.

Tul. de Div.  
l.2.

Now then, the Reasons of this so general usage and perswasion, are (I conceive) some or all of these following.

1 Joh, 4.19.

---Pueri trepidant, atque omnia cœcis In tenebris metuunt.---

1. Men (for the greater part) are wholly strangers to the causes of these prodigious accidents. Now as fear hath torment, so ignorance hath fear. It is a certain rule, *Nihil æquè facit hominem multa suspicari ac nihil scire.* Where we are unprovided of any prenotions of the qualities of objects or persons, Nature hath made us all very suspicious, and fearfull to touch, taste, and trust. Persons in the dark are full of monstrous conceits, every shadow is a dévil, and every bush a thief to them: And the more men are in the dark as to the knowledge of causes, still the more jealous and fearfull of Events: Now the most

of

of men are very ignorant, and therefore superstitiously fearfull upon any such irregular events in Nature.

---- *Formido mortales continet omnes,*

*Quod multa in terris fieri cœloque tuentur;*

*Quorum operum causas nullâ ratione videre*

*Possunt: Lucret.*

The Fools Purgatory is as familiar as the Fools Paradise; Ignorance calls every unaccountable Symptom (in the Patient) Witchcraft, and every strange accident, a Prodigy. Besides it is the usage of ignorance, especially where the objects are great, vehement, and extraordinary, which fall before it, to conceit a kinde of Divinity dwelling in them, and to regard them as examples of some vertue and power superior to Natural. Hippocrates tells us, that sad disease (in Physick stiled *morbūs sacer*, the holy or divine disease) took its appellation hence, "Αρδεωτοι εὐθύναν θεῖον εἶναι τὸν ἀπομένον καὶ δαυλωτόν". Men called it divine, from ignorance, and a blinde wonderment at the strange and vehement symptoms thereof. Moreover, it is the nature of ignorance to produce (as dissidence in the heart, so withall) confidence in the head; for those which know least of things past or present, are usually the most confident determiners concerning things future. Upon this account the multitude (to which knowledge was never very friendly) cannot but be greatly impressive to any great and religious perswasions concerning prodigies; (especially if much forc't upon them by the importunity of bold men)

2. It is the Nature of guilt to be quickly awakened into a fear of an approaching evil: It sleeps (as they say of the Hare) with its eyes open, quickly awake to see or phansie an impendent evil, how secure soever it may seem to it self, or others. Guilt is upon every slight occasion Μάλιστα νανῶν, never prophesying good concerning men, but evil; It will fly when none pursues. There go usually along with a guilty breast (when fair colours hang out in the face) black jealousies and fears, a φοβούγγατος εὐδοκίας κοινωνίας, a fearfull expectation of vengeance, and therefore (like Belshazzar) where it cannot distinctly expound Gods strange characters, it yet concludes the general intention to be wrath and judgement. The Authour of the Book of Wisdom, hath therefore well exprest the Nature of guilt, thus, *Wickedness condemned of her own witness, is very timerous; and being pressed with conscience, always forecasteth terrible things.*

Guilt hath an injured God always presented to it, now where our lives and fortunes are in the hand of offended greatness, we think more frequently what it may, then what it will do with us. Where men mistrust (as guilt generally doth) every *natus*, words good or bad, all actions, but especially such as are to us obscure and unaccountable, are the seed of jealousy. Guilt can spell death out of Gods sweetest promises, much more out of his dark and intricate providences.

3. The strict observation of Prodigies hath risen from the application of a humane measure to divine actings. All actions of consequence done in

Wisd. 17. 13.  
Τὸ μὲν σύν-  
δεσ, μῆδε κο-  
ντὸν, ἀλλ' ἀ-  
δοξονάτεχ-  
νῶς, καὶ τειμ-  
φασμάτον, εἰς  
ταύτας δο-  
ῦτη Θεο-  
γένες εἰ-  
κονίζεται καὶ  
σέβεται τὰς  
τοντές. Plus.  
περὶ μὲν Χρεῶν  
Hippocrat.  
de morb. sacro.

Wisd. 17. 11.  
Ad monstri  
conspectum  
omnes plerun-  
que subito ex-  
horrescent,  
veluti consci-  
entiam stimu-  
lo peccati vul-  
neratam ag-  
noscentes, at-  
que de ira Dei  
vel in antece-  
dentibus ani-  
malibus an-  
tadversa, vel  
in futuris ne-  
gotiis metu-  
dā singuli co-  
gitent.

S. Aug. lib. dc  
Civit. Dci.

*1 Thel. 5. 3,*

*Psa. 64. 7, 37.*

*Rev. 10. 4.*

*1 Cor. 10.*

*6, 11.*

*Aug. Scient.*

*1. 5. c. 4.*

*Isa. 55. 9.*

*Qui Rex unquam fuit,  
quis populus  
qui non uteretur prædictio-  
ne divina?*

*Tul. l. 1. de  
Divin.*

*Dan. 12. 8.*

*Mat. 24. 3.*

*1 Thel. 5. 1.*

*Joh. 21. 21,*

*22.*

the world by humane Agents, come forth *per se magnificos* with observation, they are usually prefac't with somewhat which may raise expectation, and give notice. Seneca speaks of a *pompa mortis*, there is also a *pompa vitae*: Men use not *cadere in negotia sed descendere*; and their actions of moment, though they have sometimes *abruptos fines*, yet it is seldom that they have *abrupta principia*: Now it is accordingly thought, that all Gods actions of remark, must be stamp'd with a humane signature; be ushered with the pomp and solemnity of some prodigious and preternatural occurrences. Whereas God hath threatened not only to destroy bad men by his judgements, but to surprise them, to storm them without a precedent summons. We read of nothing in the Rev. to be concealed from men, but what judgements the *seven thunders uttered*. God often by prophecies and mighty signs warned former Ages, & expects now that former Ages should warn us.

There is no one thing which hath set up such a multitude of idols, vain and fantastical conceits (as the excellent *Verulam* observes) in Philosophy, *quam naturalium operationum ad similitudinem actionum humanarum reductio*; the reducing of all natural operations to a likeness with the acts of men, and the preferring of man (the lesser world) as the great glass of Nature, in whose fabrick and actions, the similar images & imitations of all things in the greater world should be represented. And to as many vain imaginations in Divinity, hath the making (as it were) of God after their own image, and fastning upon him either *sídos* or *mádos*, or *odos avθgawtwòv*, and proposing of the customs, reasonings, and counsels of men, as the Jacobs staff, to estimate the height and extent of the counsels and actions of God, (whose ways and thoughts, as we are told, are not laid by any of those short lines which ours are) expos'd men.

4. Men are greatly propense to close with any flattering medium to arrive at the much desired knowledge of things to come. The more the fruit of the Tree of knowledge is plac't beyond our reach, the more impatient desires after it use to rite up in our minds; Now such is the knowledge of things wrapt up in futurity. Hence Astrology (which feeds men with the aery hopes of this knowledge) so valuable a science with the Chaldeans; Oracles, so much attended to by the Grecians; Auguries, by the Romans; any kinde of Prophets by the Hebrews: the *εναιστησα οὐκατα* auspicious signs amongst the ruder Heathens: In short Tully hath noted, that no King nor People ever was there with whom some presumed divine predictions, were not in use and credit: to which I further add, that it is hard to mention that thing (necessary or contingent) upon which the Ethnick vanity had not affixt some signification and presage or other. Nay, and even in very good men (in sacred writ) we finde not this itch after the knowledge of the condition of future times, sufficiently kil'd.

This desire of knowing things future, is owing partly to that mighty thirst in the soul after knowledge in the latitude thereof; partly to a secret distrust of Providence, which we cannot endure to follow even blind-fold, like Abraham, not knowing whither we go; partly to our natural restlessness in uncertainties, and the souls not enduring a perpetual

petual crucifixion between hopes and fears; partly to that impressiveness of spirit which times of action and change (for in such prodigies and prophecies are most critically recorded) are generally attended with; as also to that *nausea* which the tedious repetition of things present and familiar, creates the soul of man. For these reasons, men are very ready to attend to a Prodigy as to a kinde of silent Oracle, to resolve them in their enquiries *de futuro*, which is indeed but profane-ly to go to God, whose work it is, as they would to a common Fortune-teller.

To dismiss this particular, There are especially two sorts of things which command our minds to the most quick and serious attendences. 1. Things rare and extraordinary, Oracles, Mysteries, New notions, curious Arts, Secrets, Stories of Apparitions. 2 Predictions and Divinations: for we shall observe the soul especially delighted in its enquiries into times far past, and long hence to come; whereby it grasps (in a kinde of petty infinity) both the ends of time at once. Now then, Prodigies may quickly call forth the serious notices and regards of the most, as being *mira*, matters (in themselves) rare and wonderfull, and also (in common opinion) *monstra*, things which can shew them what is to come, and to lift the soul above the narrow *Horizon* of things present and sensible, which it hath so often surfetted and cloy'd it self withall.

5. The hand of *Joab* (the Agency of the devil) seems not a little engaged in this business [the strengthening of this opinion of Prodigies, with which the minds of men are so much possest] For he serves no small ends upon Persons entertained with such observances. By such curious ways he calls men off from more necessary searches and enquiries. Humble ignorance (he knows) in matters too high for us, is a fruitfull mother of devotion: He tempts men, like the fly, into the fire by setting the appearances and hopes of a greater light before them. Besides, he works men hereby into servile and superstitious apprehensions of God; for the Opinion of such prodigies, represents him before the soul, with a rod of Vengeance perpetually in his hand. A belief of a God, is that fort which the Devill could never storm (force by any direct temptation) and therefore he designs by such terrible and servile conceits wrought in the hearts of men, to undermine it: For perpetual jealousies and slavish fears of God (like over-heated waters) boyl over at last, and extinguish (that fire) that faith and sense of God, which first produc't them; when the Notion of a Deity stands alway before the mind (like a Gorgons head) pregnant with nothing but horrores and dismayes, it quickly works and turns it to a (stony) stupid neglect of Him; so to get rid of that *Oίκειον Δαμόνιον*, that mighty fear which was its continuall Executioner.

More-over, the Devil (no doubt) loves to bring men off from a noble and generous temper: And as it is the design of Religion to cast out fear, and to introduce a spirit of true freedome and confidence toward God, so it is the work of the Devil to call on a spirit of bondage and fear, that so he may see in men the more lively and ex-

If. 40. 5.  
Jer. 50. 38.  
Ps. 106. 36.

Serm. 68.  
De somniis.

Virgil.  
Georg. l. i.

press images and pourtraiutes of himself, who believes and trembles. He would have his rites of worship of old, οεικα μυστεια, frightfull and amizing mysteries; the Idols wherein he was worshipt, bear in their very names and titles a remembrance of that baseness and servility of spirit which attended his votaries in the service of so absolute a Tyrant, (being stil'd sometimes, מִלְאַתָּה horrors (as 'tis rendred in the margin. 2 Chron. 15. 16.) sometimes, מִשְׁעָן and, אֵמֶת signifying trouble and terrour,) and the Devils are stil'd, עֲרֵב coming from a word which signifies horrere, because usually tendering themselves to view in the most frightfull forms.

Now this superstitious perswasion of Prodigies, doth hugely minister to bondage of spirit, and tends to seal men with a mark of Cain (according to the Jews) a perpetual trembling and astonishment. The observation of prodigies proving so serviceable to the dark kingdom, if the experience of former times seem at all to credit and recommend it, I should be ready to assert that of them, which S. Bernard doth of Dreams *Ex astu Diaboli aliquando vera pronunciant, ut toties in multis fallant;* through the subtile agency of the Devil, they appear to declare truth sometimes, that they may the oftner abuse men with vain hopes or fears, with the less suspicion afterward.

6. This common perswasion in men, is owing very much to the power and Magisterial authority of a traditional superstition, handed down from the very first times of Gentile ignorance. There may very easily be a Cabala Errorum, though hardly a Cabala Veritatum; Our Nature in this laps't state (as the ground to weeds) being a Mother to errour, but (as that to good corn) a Step-mother to truth. How apt our Nature is to catch and propagate the infection of a superstitious tradition, may appear from that ancient and modern usage of praying for a Person upon neezeing, the vulgar presages consequent to the approach of any strange fish to our shore, the regarding of any casual stops and breaches in any known Rivers, any odd noyses heard in the silences of the night, and births seal'd with the odd figures of an ungovern'd imagination, and many more (too mouldy with age to set before the Reader) receiv'd of old among the Heathens, and at this day among too many Christians, as Divine Monitours, and as Natures starting out of its usual road (like the Asse in sacred Writ) because some destroying Angel stands just before it.

We shall find these and the like alterations in Nature, consequent to the death of Cæsar, and precedent to the battail at Philippi, recorded with the great regards of the Heathen Poet,

*Tempore quanquam illo Tellus quoque & aquora Ponti,  
Obscenique Canes, importunaque Volucres*

*Signa dabant —*

*Vox quoque per lucos vulgo exaudita silentes*

*Ingens —*

*Infandum! fistunt amnes, terræque debiscunt, &c.*

That which possibly assisted this tradition, was the succeeding of Rome Christian, as into the place, so into very many of the rites and usages of Rome Pagan, (as might be easily made appear at large were

were that our business) and into as large a power over the faiths and consciences of men, as *Rome Pagan* had over their bodies, and so was enabled to mold them into what Opinions or practices, they might best serve themselves upon,

7 The private Opinions of some contemplative Persons, may (possibly) not a little encourage and strengthen the perswasion of presages by Prodigies:

Those which conceive the Angels, as a kind of Heavenly Intelligencers always at hand to admonish and inform us, when (through the sagacity of their Nature) they espie a cloud of vengeance, (as yet but as big as a mans hand) ready to overspread Heaven, and to fall down upon men, may (without much forcing) perswade themselves that all these unusual occurrences are owing to their courteous Agency, designing by them to warn men by repentance to fly from the wrath approaching.

Others again seem to me to apprehend the World, as a kinde of Great Animal, inform'd by a very subtile and apprehensive Spirit, which out of a hidden and inexplicable sense of an impendent evil, (as many creatures have of an approaching storm) starts (as it were) and shrinks in, and in its several parts, suffers mighty emotions and disturbances. But this notion, will (perhaps) look more temptingly, when presented to us as the Parents thereof are pleas'd to dress it forth. There is (saith a late writer) that sympathy and fellow-feeling which God hath put in his whole creation, whereby each part hath a care of the whole, and according to its measure, doth endeavour its preservation: As in the body natural of man, upon the next and immediate approach of death some parts are put into suddain tremblings, and convulsions, whereby they discover the nearness, and, as far as they can, labour to prevent the danger of that Enemy: So God hath order'd it in the Great body of the World, that Earthquakes like convulsions, Eclipses (like fallings of the eyes) and such other unusual Prodigies, (which have an analogy and resemblance to the accidents of the body of man) should commonly precede that ruine, wherein any one State or Nation is finally to be involv'd. As when our Saviour died, the sun was darkned, the rocks were rent, the Earth-shook, by a kinde of natural sympathy and compassionate horrour, at so dreadfull and amazing a spectacle: So when Hierusalem was to be destroyed, Our Saviour himself foretells that there should be Earth-quakes, and famines, and pestilences, and fearfull sights, and great signs, as the Van-carriers and Out-guard to that more terrible desolation, which was to follow them. What the Apostle therefore says elegantly concerning future Glory, that the whole creation which was made subject to vanity and misery for mans sin, doth groan and, (as it were) travail in pain untill it be deliver'd from the bondage of corruption, and manu-mitted or set free to pertake of the glorious liberty of the sons of God; so while it is in the state of vanity, God hath put into it such a quick sense, that not one part can grieve, but it will after a sort grieve together, and discover by its tremblings, shakings, eclipses, and extraordinary changes, that there is some great judgement a coming.

The pretty allegories, and allusions of which Discourse (but the washing of weak and rotten stuff) might possibly shew not unhandsomely in an oration, but are two aery and thin for a sermon, as the

hony under the law, might be of use at the *table*, but was too frothy and luscious for the *Altar*: As for that vanity now upon the creation, it is solely passive therein, and subject to it; and as for that vizard upon the face of Nature, those direfull and amazing alterations in the frame of the world, which attended our Saviours death, and the fates of Hierusalem, they are instances (concluded) miraculous and extraordinary, (whose return may be expected with their occasions) and so are to far from coming up to, that they scarce look towards our present case, as shall appear more fully in due place:

8. *It is the Nature of the Soul to be greatly impressive to a persuasion of parallels, equalities, similitudes, in the frame and Government of the World:* and that (indeed) so far, as to make them (by the poesy of phancy) where it cannot really discover them; that so it may please and sollace it self in some supposed lines and figures of its own uniform and harmonious nature pourtray'd upon the world; and 'twere easy to shew how this temper hath betray'd it to a great many pretty dreams, both in science and common life.

This being the general temper of the Soul, it is easily inclin'd to believe great and mighty changes in states, usher'd with the solemnity of some mighty and analogous changes in Nature, and that all-terrible evils are prefac't or attended with some prodigious and amazing alterations in the creation; that so the black and dreadfull dress of the stage, may be correspondent to the tragical part shortly to be acted thereupon. The minde readily apprehends it a great *Decorum*, to imagine the children of the creation trembling, and looking gastly, and running out of their places when their Father is just a taking of the rod of vengeance into his hand. Hence perhaps it is, that we generally finde great troubles and judgements on Earth, describ'd, especiall by persons ecclatrical (Prophets and Poets) whose speeches usually rather follow *sensum animæ quam veritatem rei*, by all the examples of horrour and confusion, in the frame of the creation. The prophet David describes Gods going forth to judgement, thus, *the Earth shook and trembled, the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth, &c.* and the Apocryphal Prophet Esdras, charact'ers the horours of an approaching judgement, by predictions of (the most proper glasses to represent them) dreadfull accidents in the World, *Bloud shall drop out of the wood, and the stone shall give his voyce, the sea of Sodom shal cast out fish, and make a noyse in the night, &c.* So the day of God's vengeance upon Hierusalem, and (in that, as its type) upon the whole World, is describ'd (as some think) but figuratively, in the phrase of *turning the sun into darkness and the moon into bloud*: such expressions being correspondent to the sense of the Soul, which conceives it most proper that there appear no smiles in the face of Nature, but that she come forth cloth'd with terror and amazement, when some great vengeance and destruction is present or at hand.

This disposition of Soul, doth never more strongly exert it self, then when the Prodigies (being no unfitting emblems of the judgement) doe impregnate imagination, and offer a mighty assistance thereunto

Ps. 18. 7.

2 Esdr. 5. 5.  
6, 7, 8.

Act. 2. 10.

unto : Thus, (as 'tis call'd) the raining of bloud (which is but water tintur'd by the condition of the soyl whence it ariseth, or, rather, where it falls) shall strongly sollicite the fear of some great effusion of bloud in the state ; the appearance of two Suns at once, (which is but the figure and glory of the Sun drawn by its own beams upon a disposed cloud) doth greatly encourage the phancy of two Competitors for Royalty in a Nation ; some great Eclypse seems (to a soft imagination) to hang the world with black against the approaching funeralls of some Great Person ; the Casual parting of the River Ouse in Bedfordshire, seem'd (after the event) a presage of the succeeding division between the house of York and Lancaster. These and many more, where they meet with an imagination strong enough to supply and relieve their weakness, shall prove an event beyond Geometry, and the Reasons and experience of all men and times.

9. Humane Nature is greatly propense to entertain things vehement and extraordinary with an Opinion of a more then ordinary sacredness in, and presence of God with them. In the Old Testament, things more vulgar and accommodate to a humane size and measure, had the name of Man call'd upon them ; thus we read of the Rod of a Man. 2 Sam. 7. 14. the cords of a Man, Hos. 11. 4. the pen of a Man. Is. 8. 1. that is gentle, and usual : on the other side, things rare and which hardly admit their pattern, are attributed unto God, Horeb the Mount of God. Exod. 3. 1. the River of God. Ps. 65. 9. the trees of God Ps. 104. 16. the fire of God. Job. 1. 6. that is, great and extraordinary. Now the ancient Hebrews (to whose law of speaking the Holy Ghost accommodates himself) in their castomes and language, seem to make the truest report of the easy tentiments of simple Nature.

Accordingly, these strange and prodigious alterations in Nature, appear to men, (because not of familiar occurrences) stampt with some Characters and touches of Divinity ; and so apt to raise a great opinion of themselves in men, as if sent forth upon no less errand then to call them to an expectation of some strange work from God.

From what hath been hitherto discourtst, 'tis easy to infer the fallacie of that First Argument (against us) taken from the common persuasions of men. For it is a perswasion very general indeed, but growing not from natural but casual or abusive principles ; And in such a case, the more common and prevalent the perswasion be, the more dangerous, because it derives a great credit upon errore, and gives it the colour of an Oracle. Vox populi is a fallacious topick to conclude from, except the Opinion generally maintain'd cross the ease and interest of the World, and men like Uriah carry the letters, (the Principles) which judge and condemn themselves [as the common notions concerning Good and evil, of the Existence of a Deity, a Future judgement, the Souls immortality, &c.] 'tis in this case a sign that the truth is seal'd upon the Natures of men, and rather lays hold of them; then they of it.

And this in answer to that first objection.

Pessimum  
omnium est  
augurium

quod ex con-  
sensu capitur,  
in rebus intel-  
lectualibus,  
&c. nihil  
enim multis  
placet nisi  
imaginatio-  
nem feriat,  
aut intelle-  
ctum vulga-  
rium notio-  
num nodis  
astringat.

Verul. Nov.  
Org. Aph.

77.

SECT.

## CHAP. IV.

## The Objection grounded on humane authority answer'd.

The testimonies of Heathens, Fathers, Modern writers, alledg'd against the truth contended for: Answer'd, first more Generally, some account given why so many learned men have given countenance to the contrary perswasion. A particular return to the testimony of Herodotus. Heathens, greatly fond of this notion, and why. The Fathers no great favourers of this Doctrine. The Testimony of Tertullian unserviceable to our Adversaries. S. Austin express against them. The testimony of Machiavel disabled by a three fold consideration. D. Jackson, whence (in probability) so inclinable to the regard of Prodigies; some account of his lost book of Prodigies. The ill use the Heathens made of Prodigies, the observation of them unbecoming our Religion, and a dishonour to God.

Arguments from humane Authority, generally shew better in Rhetorick then Logick, and press the modesties of men more then their Judgements. Yet, because the Most judge altogether by their Proxies, and are apt to suspect fallacies in strong reasons, but none in Great names, I shall next make answer to a second Objection with which this truth is assaulted, viz. the Testimony of learned writers [Heathens, Fathers, Modern Authours] to the contrary: where, two of each kinde it may suffice to take as the representatives of the Rest.

Among Heathen Writers, Herodotus seems to our Adversaries of especial remark in this Argument, entering it as a try'd case *Quoties ingentes eventuræ sunt calamitates vel civitati, vel nationi, solent signis prænunciari*, and Valerius Maximus seems to subscribe the Opinion in that whole chapter which he hath written *De Prodigis*, and the Regards due to them.

1. 6. c. 27.  
Cuncta animalia humanae usibus subdita, &c. non solum aliorum, verum etiam Dominorum aversabantur accessum, non sine exitio aut periculo audentis, si quis de proximo urgeret.  
De Civit. Dei. l. 3. c. 23.

Among the Fathers, we finde Tertullian telling the Heathens (describing the Christian Doctrine of an Everlasting fire) of some prodigious Mountains always burning; upon occasion whereof, He adds, *hoc erit testimonium ignis aeterni, hoc exemplum jugis judicii; pœnam nutritentes Montes iruntur & durant*. And S. Austin having noted that a little before the *Bellum sociale* in the Romane Empire, dogs, horses, oxen, asses, and such like creatures (usually the most submissive subjects to the law of obedience to man) all on a sudden, put off their gentle and tractable Natures, ran away from their owners, grew fierce and hurtfull, and approacht as near to Lyons and Wolves as their shapes and figures would permit: of which strange occurrence, He thus delivers his sense, *Quod si hoc signum fuit quod tantum malum fuit, quantum malum fuit illud, cuius hoc signum fuit!* Amongst Modern Writers, Machiavel, (a Person generally thought a more fast retainer to Atheism then superstition) hath thus abettet the observation of Prodigies, *Ut causam facile confitebor me ignorare, ita rem ipsam cum ex antiquis tum novis exemplis agnoscere oportet & confiteri, omnes magnos motus quicunque*

quicunque aut urbi aut Regioni evenerunt, vel a conjectoribus, vel a Revelatione aliqua, prodigiis aut cœlestibus signis prædicti & prænunciari solere to whom may be added (to pass by Luther, Melancthon, Camerarius and others) the Testimony of the Reverend D. Jackson: The manner (saith Serm. on He) of Gods forewarning is very various; sometimes he forewarns by signs in Luk. c. 13, the sun and moon, sometimes by apparitions in the Ayr, sometimes by monstrous 6, 7, 8. births, sometimes He makes the murrain of Cattel, and Mortality of beasts of the field, or birds of the ayr, fore-runners of plagues and wars, &c. And so Vid. Prefat. far received he them, ος Θεος κηρυγμα (as Eusebius stiles the Portenta to his Book preceding the overthrow of Hierusalem) Gods visible Sermons of Re- of the eternal pentance, that as we are inform'd He wrote a just Treatise (lost in his truth of life-time) concerning Prodigies or Divine Forewarnings betokening Bloud. Scriptur.

Edit. 1653:

To all which Testimonies, my answer shall be first more General: That 'tis no wonder to see this Opinion credited by some Great names, in regard that as in Heresy, *Populus sequitur Doctiores*, the People usually follow the Learned, as being (in a matter more abstract and subtile) more apt to believe then to judge; so in Superstition, *Doctiores sequuntur Populum*, the Learned are (not seldom) observ'd to follow the People: because easily surpris'd into an Opinion that can enter so valuable a plea for it self as common consent. This Notion of Presages by Prodigies being so popular and catholick, wise men (in their first and unwary years, when they are *discipuli plebium*) may entertain conceits thereof which shall plead prescription against the strongest reasons to dispossess them. As Iron in a greater and more massy bodie, *sequitur naturam communem*, follows the law of common Nature in all heavy bodies, and moves to the Earth; but in smaller pieces, *sequitur naturam privatam*, it follows its own private nature, and directs it self to the Loadstone; Thus learned men, where they are prest by the force and weight of Education, and a common prejudice, generally follow common Nature in men, (which inclines to embrace Society) and therefore move in judgment, *Secundum viam Terræ*; but in matters out of vulgar ken, and where they cannot be tempted by a common agreement they move *secundum viam consilii*, and perue the dictates of their own private light and understanding. Even wise men, (in many instances) held *Aras & focos*, their faith and their estates, by the same tenure, *tradition from Ancestours*, and therefore we may receive their judgements (*tanquam ex Cathedra*) as engagements to consider; not always (*tanquam ex Tripode*) as obligations to believe.

I proceed next to a more distinct and particular answer, to the severall Authorities alledg'd. And first to the Testimony of Heathens. The many places of Scripture wherein God hath threatned to issue out a speedy arrest upon Persons deeply indebted to him, without so much as warning them by any lesser judgements and signs of Vengeance, to agree with Him while in the way, doe sufficiently resolve me of the vanity of that foremention'd assertion of Herodotus. Yet because it is deliver'd upon the seeming faith of a great experience, and our Adversaries build so much upon it: I return to it;

1. It is a conclusion which proceeds upon the credit of a single instance:

F

that

that of the people of Chios there mentioned, whose final desolation was usher'd by two very affecting examples; One, that of a hundred young men whom they sent to Delphos, two onely return'd, the rest being consumed by Pestilence; another, (but a little after the same time) the roof of the Schol-house fell so suddenly, that of an hundred and twenty children, but one escap'd with life. Of which He saith *ταῦτα μέρος σημαντικά ὁ θεός προεδείξει* these signs God fore-shew'd their approaching fate withall. Now with this so shallow and contracted a foundation, he ventures the building of his Catholick assertion. *Quoties ingentes, &c.* A thing not much to be wonder'd at, because where men are very fond of an assur'd principle, any single example which speaks favour for it, shall be more attended unto, then a hundred which disparage and refute it: Besides, one Affirmative (especially, if plausible, as this is) doth far more affect and engage our minds, then (many more evident) Negatives, because they are infinite, disperse our sight, and deliver us to uncertainty.

2. It is no wonder at all to meet with such an assertion amongst Heathens and any little Accidents blown out, by a superstitious phancy, into the shew and appearance of strange Omens, if we consider;

1. That they look upon their Gods as a kinde of Fayries, which would throw firebrands and furies about the house, for the omission of some petty criticisms in their rites, and that (therefore) they give forth frequent intimations of these impotencies and distasts. They thought they were lost with a trifle, and won again to a good Opinion of them by paying them the homage of a little crouching and circumstantial Devotion.

2. The hopes and fortunes of the Heathens were layd up generally in this world, and therefore their fears in reference to it, were easily awakened. The Heathen Cæcilius (truly) acknowledg'd, that all the religious rites instituted by their Ancestours, were level'd to no higher an end, then the good of this lower life; being either intended as gratefull returns to the Divine bounty for some temporal favours receiv'd, or devout addresses to divert a feared, or appease a felt displeasure of the Deity. And therefore no wonder, they were soon awaken'd into a great fear when any strange occurrence (of whose end and cause they were unresolv'd) fell before their notice; least it should abode the running of that vessel upon rocks, wherein their hopes and happiness were imbarke't. Men are apt to entertain great fear in reference to that wherein they apprehend themselves greatly concern'd.

To the testimony of Fathers I answer (in General) that 'twere no wonder to find them (living so near the times of Gentilism) speaking in favour sometimes, for some of the Doctrines thereof; the main trunck and body of the Gentile superstition, was indeed hewn down in their minds, but still there were some small roots and fibres remaining, which are observ'd to spring up ever and anon, and trouble their writings. But however we shall (I believe) seldom find them expressing any great regard to this grand doctrine of the Gentile Theology.

Majores nos  
stros depre-  
hendes initi-  
asse ritus  
omnium reli-  
gionum vel ut  
remuneraretur  
Divina indul-  
gentia, vel ut  
averteretur  
imminens ira,  
aut ut jam  
tumens &  
fæviens pla-  
caretur:  
Minut. Fel.

As

As for Tertullian, howsoever he may seem (like some carved images about houses) to support and grace our adversaries building, yet he will prove (in truth) to be like them barely forc't and fasten'd on, and to lend no strength at all thereunto; for 1. the Father writing to the Heathens there, might lawfully discourse with them *Ex hypothesi Ethnicæ Theologiæ*; for they regarded those mighty *Vulcanos*, as the courts of *Pluto*, and a kind of testimony or fit emblem of the fires and vengeance in another state. 2. He stiles these fires eruptions, but *testimonium & exemplum*, a testimony and example of the Divine judgment, which in a laxe sense he might well doe, these seeming to be let forth by the Divine wisdom, as glasses and pictures to convey to the duller world some weak images of the horrors of those everlasting burnings in another world. 3. These durable fires are alledged not as any signs of an everlasting burning, but as the best argument Nature afforded to prove the possibility of such a burning against the sons of Nature, who thought a fire which consumes not, to be a great contradiction. And to a like purpose we find the very same instances alledg'd against them by another of the Ancients. *Sicut ignes fulminum corpora tangunt nec absumunt, sicut ignes Minut. Fel. Atnæ & Vesuvii & ardantium ubique terrarum flagrant nec erogantur; ita pœnale illud incendium non damnis ardantium pascetur, sed inexesa corporum laceratione nutritur.*

To the testimony of S. Austin, I answer, 1. That strange occurrence (by him mention'd) might possibly appear to him cloth'd in more significant circumstances then to us it doth; who cannot but look at the sudden *Mania*, of so many creatures but as the natural, though more unusual effect, which in those hotter climates, the un-fitting season of the year might possibly have upon them. 2. He speaks but doubtfully thereof, *Hoc si signum fuit.* 3. But if our adversaries appeal to S. Austin, to S. Austin shall they goe. Who (in his more awaken'd thoughts) thus delivereth himself in defiance of all such Ominous observations,

*Monstra dicta sunt à Monstrando, quod aliquid significando demonstrent, & Ostenta ab Ostendendo, Portenta à portendendo, id est, præostendendo, & Prodigia, quod porro dicant, id est, futura prædicant. Sed viderint eorum conjectores quomodo ex iis five fallantur, five instinctu Spirituum (quibus curæ est, tali pœna dignos animos hominum noxiæ curiositatis retibus impli-care) vera prædicant, five multa dicendo aliquando in aliquid veritatis incurrant.* S. August. De Civit. Deil. 28. c. 8.

The testimony of Machiavel will appear, of no great moment, in this Argument if it be considered;

1. Those signs which he hath noted in the same chapter as the præcurrsours of some great evils, are vain, beyond the visions of a feaver, and the whispers of the wind; for he there tells us that the death of Lorenzo de Medices, the Founder of the Dukedom of Tuscany in his family, was portended by the defaceing of their Great Temple in Florence, by fire from heaven; and the Banishment of Petrus Soderinus (one of the Pillars of State) by the burning of the Senate house by lightning. [Tenterden Steeple and Goodwin Sands!] we may conclude by these ears that the

Eph. 2.12.

Levit. 26.36.

whole harvest of his other observations, he grounded his fore-mentioned speech upon, was little besides chaff and husk.'

2. *The suspicion of Atheism, renders him also not a little to the suspicion of Superstition.* The Heathens of old styl'd (<sup>Ἄθεοι εὐνόσων</sup>) Atheists in the world, were the most superstitious observers of presages and Omens. They which live most in neglect of God, think they see tokens of a divine Nemesis, in every strange accident they behold. Superstition and Atheism (like water and ice) produce one another; slavish and superstitious fears of God, leading to Atheism as their cure, and Atheism leading to greater fears of him, as its deserved punishment. 'Tis a great justice, that that wickedness should be punished with false fears, which hath discarded the true. They which will not fear God, and hell, and sin, shall fear a Prodigie ; being therein like the horse ( to which they stand compared, Fer. 8. 6.) which will start at its shadow, and yet rush [furiously and without fear] into the battel.

3. *Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.* The wheel of Providence is continually going over Kingdoms and Persons. The world (like Mount Calvary) presents us with nothing almost but crosses and deaths, spectacles of misery, [Heaven onely is a Kingdom that cannot be shaken; ] and therefore, no wonder if any unusual accidents, be soon seconded by some tragedy or other, though never intended its Prologue, and precedent Monitour.

The error (as I doubt not to style it) of the Reverend Doctor Jackson in this argument, may be easily pardoned to his singular piety and learning; the light and lustre of which (like that of the Sun) may easily hide any of his spots and blemishes from the severer eyes and notices of the world. Great minds (like the heavenly bodies) though they are moved (for the main) with the force of the *Primum mobile*, the weight and evidence of truth; yet they appear sometimes to have their *declinationes proprias*, some private motions and declinations of their own, to which their peculiar *Genius*, impressions from the Age, or their education may very fatally betray them. This opinion concerning Prodigies, and signs of events future (which the general strain of his writings speaks his minde hugely possest and dy'd withall) I am ready to reckon amongst those *Idola specūs*, false notions, which the black and melancholy mansion his excellent soul plainly appears to have dwelt in, did abuse his minde withall. Any events extraordinary in the world, seem all along to have had a great impression upon his soul, and seem expounded sometimes a little more particularly then their just value and moments will well warrant and allow. Melancholy is of a very impressive temper, and poetick nature, and is apt (like a dark room) to receive in the images of objects without, in very monstrous and antick figures and representations.

\*Joh. Polycar.  
his Tract.

Tragic.  
Camerar. de  
Ostent.  
Peucer. his  
Teratoscos.

As for his *Book of Prodigies* mentioned, I profess my self not greatly tempted to follow its casual loss, with any deep sighs; and that not onely because mens understandings have been too much undervalued by \*books of that Nature, already extant to a number sufficient to a cure

cure of the most troublous curiosity in such enquiries; but,

1. Because the few Prodigies and signs of times commended with a great seriousness to our notices in his Sermons on Luke (taken for the greatest part, out of Herodotus, Livie, Valer. Max. and Machiavel) will appear to any man (that doth not use to start at shadows) too thin and weak to bear up any such weighty and serious conclusions, as he teacheth his Reader to build upon them, (the knowledge whereof, I had rather should be owing to the Readers curiosity, than to my rehearsal) Now I think we may make some judgement of the value of the whole piece, by the coursiness of a Remnant thereof.

2. Because it designed an Errorum Apotheosis, a kinde of consecration of the greatest part of the errours and follies of the Gentile superstition; as appears in a high degree of probability from those words which fall from him in the fore-cited papers; where (speaking of such kinde of Portenta and signs of heaven, at which the Heathen used to be dismayed.) he thus delivers himself: *Though to believe as much concerning the signs of the times, as the Heathens did; though to make as good or better use of them then they did, be not sufficient to acquit us from ruine and destruction fore-signified: yet, not to believe as much as they did, not to make so good an use as they did, not to be so much affected as they were, is enough and more then enough to condemn us, enough to bring that ruine and calamity which they portend or fore-signifie, inevitably and in full measure upon us.* A strange speech! What is this but to set Christians, aurum colligere ex stercore, (as Virgil said he did, when reading of Ennius) to gather the gold of devout fears, and Christian foresights from the dung and drofs of all the Ethnick Ostenta, and auspicious observations where-ever occurring? For my own part, were I under the Religion of any such perswasion: that all strange accidents are the warnings of heaven, I should conclude it a great service to God and the good of men, to exhort (as opportunity invited) the Christian Magistrate to institute some such Colledges as the Romanes had, (who received them all, ut monita deorum, which should profess themselves Prodigorum Interpretes, and should be ready to offer to the world the most trusty rules and Principles I were master of, to manage their interpretations, so that we might with some assurance conclude the intent and meaning of God in them. As for that good use the Heathens made of these things (wherein they are recommended to our imitation) what was it? did they not receive any strange accidents as the indications whence to proceed to a crisis of times, and to put a difference between lucky or inauspicious hours, and days, (as if any times were delivered out of the thoughts and regards of heaven?) Did they not use upon any prodigious event, to consult the (λόγια θεύς) devils Oracles, (a matter pardonable to their hypothesis) to understand the intent and meaning of the gods in them? Did they not approach the altars of their angry deities, in a nicer observation of all the criticisms of superstition, and the arbitrary injunctions of their religion? Did they not increase to such a body and bulk at last, as to disturb the peace of common life, (where observed and retained) and to bring some men to a discarding of all thoughts of religi-

on and a Deity, as a kinde of Furies perpetually haunting their inward house, and bereiving them of all true generousness, peace and freedom of spirit? But where do we ever finde that these pretended alarms from heaven, did awaken men out of that profound sleep which in the darker times of Gentilism they were fallen into; and perswade them (or any others) into a correction of their lives and manners? To return;

3. Because such signs as these are supposed to be, appear greatly unworthy the Majesty and Wisdom of God. That Scripture might appear to be

Exod. 32.16.

**מִקְרָב אֱלֹהִים** (in the language of Moses) the Writing of God, he hath been pleased to imprint such characters of Divinity both upon the matter and style thereof, that those weak prenotions we have of infinite Wisdom, Goodnes, Majesty do attest and bear witness to it, as worthy and befitting God. And surely were these Prodigies intended Διός Κήρυκες, the Heralds of heaven, there would appear (to severe and knowing persons) somewhat able to fill out their name and title; somewhat correspondent to those anticipations which the soul of man hath of what is becoming the Wisdom, Majestie, and Holiness of God. As God cannot be loved, but by appearing before the soul, big with what-ever he hath framed it to embrace and open it self unto; so neither can he be reverenced and observed, but by such displays of himself, which he knows the soul apt to receive, with the most awfull expressions of observance and regard.

Now then what man, that hath any great thoughts of the Majestie of heaven, can once imagine he ever intended any base and deformed monsters, the interpreters of any of his great counsels and purposes? Did God generally under the weak and worldly state of the Jewish Church, send forth those Prophets, whose learning, education, holy lives, great works, admirable gifis, commanded even profane men to a reverence of their Persons and message: and doth he now make use of Monsters, Comets, Meteors, or the apparitions of unclean spirits, as his Praecones publici? Can we ever think that the wise God would have men understand his meaning, when speaking to them by signs, which (like pictures) look to any way, speak to any sense and purpose, the differing fancies of men please? All the signs God ever spake to men by, gave forth (either by their own nature, or his own exposition) λόγον ἐνομον, a significant speech; the wonders in Egypt, the rites of the Pass-over, the elements in the Sacrament, are all *Signa vocalia*; and the signs and wonders, which (as commonly thought) were Gods trumpets, before he fell upon Hierusalem, were all (to speak with Eusebius) εναγὴν ἦ τεραῖνονται μέλλονται ἐγνωμονία τεραῖται, wonders big with energy, and clearly significative of the approaching desolation. Besides, can it be imagined that infinite Goodness, having appointed us a Religion, pregnant with contemplations fit to entertain an Angel, levelled to the lifting up of the spirits of men to that way of life which is above, that comes forth to give us παρρησίαν περὶ Θεόν, freedom of speech and approach unto God, and to chase before it all those pale fears, and jealousies of himself (the dreadfull apparitions which astonish'd men heretofore while sitting in darkness)

ness and the shadow of death) should now task us to a devout observation of the familiar miscarriages of Nature in one kinde or other, and to debase our selves to the bondage of some blinde and confus'd fears of his vengeance, upon the news of a monster, some ludicrous pranks of vile spirits, or a fiery exhalation?

Upon an account of the Premises, (were I inclined to an observation of Omens and Prodigies) I should (as Prodigies use to be differently interpreted) make an inverted use of the Reverend Publisher of this Great Authours works: [ Reader, write this a Prodigy, that this Treatise alone concerning Prodigies, should be lost, and that in the Authours life-time ] and conclude, that God (in favour to the understandings of men) provided, that (like the dead body of Moses) it should lie buried, none knowing where, that so it might not be made an Idol of, which perhaps the Reverence of so great a name might hāve inclined some to do.

I should not have spoken so much, (not to his, but my own prejudice) of so Reverend a Person, but that I am desirous to cut off all the locks, wherein I can but conceive the strength of this superstitious persuasion may lie, which (as weeds do by good ground) tends but to eat out the heart and strength of that devout fear, from which it seems to spring:

## SECT. V.

## An Answer to the Objection fetcht from Experience.

The Objection proceeding upon experiance proposed, further confirmed from Lucan, Plinie, others. That plea evinc'd Unsafe, False, Fallacious: Men prone to conclude general maxims from a few examples, and why. Some Prodigies mentioned in History, originally Apologues. Superstition oft brings the evil it feareth, and Atheism the civil it slights.

**T**hirdly, It is further opposed, that common Experience (the surest correctour of all Idol notions and hastie reasonings) seems to support this perswasion concerning Prodigies. They have always been known succeeded by great evils, and those generally such as they seemed the most natural symbols and representations of. Lucan speaking of the tragedies of Pompey's fall, and the changes consequent thereunto, describes them ushered by the direfull Prologues of many prodigious alterations in the face of the Creation.

*addita sati*

*Pharsal. lib. 1.*

Pejoris, manifesta fides, Superique minaces  
Prodigiis terras implerunt, aethera, pontum,  
Ignota obscuræ viderunt sydera noctes,  
Ardentemque polum flammis, cœloque volantes  
Obliquas per inane faces, crinemque tremendi.  
Syderis, & terris mutantem regna Cometen, &c.

Which words, because the Objection is a little concerned in them,  
I shall

I shall crave leave of the more serious Reader thus to paraphrase upon them;

Nature miscarries with a fright, and starts  
Quite out of order, in her several parts  
At fates foreseen: New stars shone in the skies,  
(The torches to attend his obsequies)  
Nature was backward rung, whilst heavenly ire  
Had set the very firmament on fire.  
A curled star appear'd and Mortals quake,  
Whose fear had turn'd each hair into a snake.  
A burning Comet did sad fate's portend,  
(Heaven Kingdoms sells by such a candles end)

And the Poet goes on there to give in such a catalogue of amazing accidents, which (I think) will hardly obtain the readers pardon (much less his faith) but by extending his Patent of *Poetica licentia*, beyond a bare liberty in reference to the quantity of his words.

<sup>a</sup> Cometes antecessit exitus (Dionis fide)  
Claudii, Vitellii, Didii, Juliani, Severi, Macrini, quibus adde Car. 5. Matthiam &

Annam Regiam M. Brit. Nunc. Prophet. p. 22.  
<sup>b</sup> Hæc (auspicia, ostenta) veteres

rerum magis eventis moniti, quam ratione docti probaverunt. Tul. De Div. l. i. Quando fuit quod trium quatuorve annorum spatio, non Rex aliquis, Magnus

Dux aut Princeps mortuus sit? Obiit M. Rex Philippus Imp. Ser. Hisp. Regina proles ejus Galliae Rex, Seren. Maximil. à quo Cometa? nullus apparuit certe; si apparuisset; miser Cometa homicidiorum omnium reus fuisset Fien. de Com. p. 39.

1. s. c. 4.

<sup>a</sup> Besides, experience hath long assur'd the World, that heaven never lighted up any of those Unusual candles (Comets) but upon an approaching night of misery to a state, by wars, or the death of Princes or plagues, &c. The Comet An. 1618. was followed with an Iliad of evils in Germany over which it seem'd more directly impendent. Pliny (speaking of Earth-quakes) proposeth it as of universal observation, Nunquam Urbs Romana tremuit, &c. Never did the City of Rome tremble by an earthquake, but events prov'd it a presage of great mischiefs to ensue.

<sup>b</sup> I answer, 1. This plea is very unsafe; in regard it can hardly (like beseidg'd men) open a gate to let in those it favours, but a great troop of enemies (to all iobriety) will crowd in after. All the follies of observation of dreams, predictions by the stars, divination by inspection of beasts, Auguries, pretending to be the dictates of long experience, and of tradition handed to the World from the very first times thereof.

<sup>c</sup> 2. This plea is very false; for there have hapned many deaths of Princes never honour'd with the solemnity of any precedent Comet, or other object of wonder; and many Comets which never seem'd to blast the affairs of the world, by any envious and malignant aspect thereupon. Only when folly hath often shot its bolt and casually hit the mark (the event seeming to smile upon and commend its presages) there is a mighty notice taken thereof; and that,

1. Because (as 'tis well noted by the <sup>d</sup> Lord Bacon, *Natura intellectus humani, magis afficitur affirmativis & activis, quam negativis & privativis*: and accordingly where a rule or observation holds, or hits in some one, it makes a more lively impression then the failing thereof in a hundred instances; that which is (as he well observes) *omnis*

*superstitionis & vanæ credulitatis radix*, the root of all superstition and vain credulity (in astrologie, Dreams, Omens, Prodigies, &c.) that which may derive some strength and credit from what <sup>e</sup> Hero-dotus tells us, viz. That there were more prodigies found out by the Egyptians (perhaps because of a traditional reverence of signs and wonders continu'd among them from the very times of Moses wherein so many happened) then by any other Nation whatsoever: and their usage was when any Prodigie hapned to write it down, and observe the event succeeding; and if ever any like Prodigie hapned, they easily concluded it would be issu'd in a similar event. The mind of man is apt to be greatly mov'd and affected with objects which strike upon it strongly and unawares, and lead it into wonder and ecstacy; and easily invited to believe (especially because loath to be dodg'd and abus'd with endless dissimilitudes and diversities among things) that other things will fall like those few with which it is so strongly affected and prepossess't.

2. Because any great evils (like some harsher passages in Musick) use to make strong impressions on our memories, and are generally made use of as a kind of little Epochas, whence we reckon our times. Whereas great blessings slide off from our minds, and are soon deliver'd to silence and forgetfulness: or else such prodigious accidents would soon appear (if at all) to prophecy as oft smooth, as harsh and evil things concerning us.

Thirdly. (*Nam pluribus exceptionibus uti, nemo prohibetur*) this plea is (at best) but very fallacious and uncertain; and that upon many accounts;

1. As many and great evils have been consequent to Prodigies, so also are they to many and great evils; the World is acquainted with any thing better then consistence; its nature seems emblem'd in its figure, it is round, and accordingly in perpetual motion and turning from one side, (state and condition) to another. And therefore as the Disciples said to our Saviour (in that great croud, Luk. 8. 45.) when demanding who toucht Him? *Seest thou the multitude thronging thee, and sayst thou who toucheth me?* so say I, when we see such a multitude of changes and evils in the world, thronging of Prodigies before and after, shal wee be so vain, as to ask what persons death, or what event is toucht upon and pointed unto in their meaning and signification?

<sup>f</sup> Undenam  
constat Come-  
tas ad aliquid  
nobis signifi-  
candum usur-  
pari? an ali-  
unde quam

2. This plea builds upon a most unfaithfull and sinking foundation, viz. the credit of all those prodigious narrations which books and common discourse, are stuft out withall: which will shrink to a mean account, if we consider how prone a faith men have for such kind of relations as these, arising either from a vain opinion of themselves, (as if worthy for whose sake God should be continually altering of nature, and making of signs) or too high a conceit of men and the concerns of this life, <sup>f</sup> hence they conceive a great man cannot be born without some strange presage, nor fall without some sympathy appearing in the very creation. Besides the minds of men finding themselves too great and large to be contentedly entertain'd with the dry and scanty contemplation of things little and

ex vanitate  
qua miseri-  
turgesimus,  
dum digni-  
nobis ipsis vi-  
demur,  
propter quos  
haec ostenta-  
fiant?  
Gassend.  
Meteor.  
p. 1165.

vulgar, doe readily encourage the relations of things new and rare, and that have some touches and Umbrages of more wonderfull and magnificent, then this [λεπτὰ καὶ νόστρα]. common scene of the World can present them with. Again some of these recorded Prodigies, were (in all likelihood) *Apologues* at first, translated in time (by the easy multitude) into the repute of real histories. That, of a

Lib. 7. c. 57. *Mare bringing forth a Hare*, recorded by *Herodotus*, as a Prodigie presaging the overthrow of *Xerxes* his great Army, was (no doubt) the defeat of that Army (appearing to the eye at first, in the strength and pride of a horse, but concluding in the fears and flight of a hare) related originally in a parable. As for the many prodigies related

Virg. Georg. by Heathen Poets (*Lucan*, *Virgil*, as also *Ovid*) it shall suffice in this l. 1. sub. fin. place, to return, that they are related by Heathen Poets : *By Heathen*] Ovid. Met. whose misery it was (by the subtily of the Devil and their Priests) l. 15. sub. fin. to be abus'd with the faith of a great many vainly reputed or falsely reported prodigies ; *By Poets*] whose privilege it is (without the reproach of a lye) ingenuously to abuse their Readers with the relation of things (apt to move Wonder and raise affection) never acted but upon the stage of imagination.

3. God may possibly sometimes in judgement, bring an evil upon men, (but falsely conceiv'd) presaged by a prodigie. It is not unlikely, that the evils thought portended by prodigies are often consequent to them, because God will punish, as in some, a superstitious credulity, and a timerous distrust of his providence, so in others, a bold and blind neglect thereof, exprest in a scornfull rejection of any such suppos'd signs and intimations of a Divine displeasure (Providence often reacheth not its wings to such Persons as either neglect it by vain fears, or dare it by bold hopes)

*Excessus fiduciæ, res ut profana, ita semper infelix*

Vérol. De Aug. Sci. l. 8.

That which may possibly pass with some for no rash example to abet this assertion is the instance of *Vespasians* death, of whom its recorded, that when notice was given him of a Comet, then appearing, as a presage of his death ; He bad the Relaters to deliver this message to the King of *Parthia*, *Ille comatus, ego autem calvus*; meaning, that seeing that King wore long hair, it seem'd most probable, that this *stella crinita* (as the Romans call'd it) did portend his death rather then the Emperour *Vespasians* who was bald : But the Emperour dyed before the extinction of this Comet, and that King surviv'd both. Now though I incline not (with that Reverend Person) to attribute his suddain death to a disregard of this Prodigie as his summons to the divine tribunal, (for how could he possibly understand it to be such ?) Yet to conclude this profane neglect of a matter (then suppos'd) religious and sacred, to have influenc't his death, is I think neither to be uncharitable nor superstitious. [I question not the truth of at least some of those observations the Heathens made of a Divine Nemesis, often asserting the honour of Religion by avenging the neglect and scorn of their (though superstitious rites) upon principles of Atheism.] Otherwise, had that speech of the Emperour, been the issue of a duely inform'd judgment, it had been (for the matter) as allowable a sarcasm, as

D Jackson  
Serm. on  
Luk. 13. 5.

Wisd. 14.

29, 30.

Vid. Valer.

Max. de Re-

lig. neglect.

c. 1. & de

Prodig. c. 6.

as that therewith Elijah reprehended the Religion of the image of Baal.

## SECT. VI.

## An Answer to the Objections proceeding upon the more immediate principles of Reason.

The first Objection, God must be suppos'd to warn before he strike ; Answered in four particulars, the Rational intimations of a judgement, what ? Second Objection, that the removal of this opinion of Prodigies, weakens the faith of a Divine Providence ; answered the Opinion evinc'd rather to invalidate the article. Third Objection, It appears not to what end they can serve, but that of presages; the danger of this objection noted, the alledging of this end prov'd vain by affixing more great and excellent ends.

The next Objections which expect our answer, proceed upon the more immediate principles of Reason : whereof the first is this, It seems greatly to justle the notions of goodness and justice in God, to believe he warns not before he strikes ; now what warnings more proper and proportion'd to their end, than Prodigies, which speak to the senses, and so are most likely to make the duller multitude start and reflect ? There are some [καιεῖ ἐποκότης, καὶ εὐδικίων] times of visitation and vengeance, times wherein the cup of vengeance is become brim-full, and ready to run over, when Gods repentings are come to an end, when his three worthies Noah, Daniel, and Job, should not prevail for the pardon or reprieve of a condemned Nation. Now then surely 'tis but reasonable to presume that infinite Goodness hath so provided that there should be some signs of such times, that the repentance of good men might, at least, break the fall of that talent of lead, which it cannot altogether prevent, surely an Earth-quake would now be a seasonable Monitour, and (like a shaking before a burning fit) be a very significant fore-runner of some fiery indignation shortly to break forth.

I answer, 1. Such warnings if given, would not work so kindly upon the ill-natur'd World, as it is presumed ; for some evil men, would like Vermine soon quit that house, that Nation of whose sudden ruines they had such sure presages : and others would fight against heaven the more desperately, as expecting no quarter from it ; few would express the good spirit of Josiah, who though he knew that evil was determin'd upon Hierusalem, yet reform'd he with all his might.

2. God often warns men by his judicia leviora. The language of his lighter judgements, is, *Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.* He usually scrapes the infected house, before one stone be not left upon another, and makes the corrections of his rods, Monitours of his approaching scorpions,

3. Shall any man teach God wisdom ? We have already the terrible G. 2 threatnings

Objection 1.

Luke 19.41.  
Jer. 50.27.

Sol.

2 King. 22.  
17.

Luk. 21. 11.

Virgil. Ge-  
org. l. 1.

Ezek. 22. 15.

Hos. 9. 7.  
l. 19. 11. 24.

threatnings contained in Scripture, and (*aliena pericula*) the great examples of divine justice, there alway presented to our fear and caution: and they which regard not the thunder of Gods threatenings, would never be much moved with the squibs of a few Prodigies. None greater expectants of signs from heaven, then the Jews, but when God gave them and others, *fearfull sights and great signs from heaven*, none so stupidly regardless and inobservant.

4. There are other kinde of Prodigies, by which wise men may receive more certain notices of an approaching evil in a state. As there is a natural divination, whereby the birds can presage an approaching storm and tempest; (that which gave birth to the opinion that they were *Divorum interpres*). so there is an artificial one, appropriate to every art and mysterie almost. The Physician hath *prognostica mortis*, the Natural Philosopher his presages of winds and seasons, the Mariner of storms and calms, the Husbandman, many of fruitfulness and plentie (elegantly described by the Poet): so also the prudent States-man hath his Prospective of many signs, by which he can spy a trouble and change in the state, as yet a great way off:

-----*Ille etiam cæcos instare tumultus*

*Sæpe monet, fraudesque & operta tumescere bella.*

Such had that Politician, who upon a view of the manners of the city where he came, brake out, *O urbem venalem & citò perituram, si emptorem invenerit!*

Now the signs and Prodigies which thus forewarn him, are such as these; 1. *Monstra vitiorum & doctrinarum*, monsters of vices and opinions generally obtaining therein. When the old man is grown too big for the girdle of shame or fear, and the hand of publick justice neglects to rub off that rust, which is growing upon the iron Age, it may quickly be expected that God should do his own work himself, assert his own righteousness, by throwing it into the fire of some terrible judgement, to refine and purifie it. So also, such monstrous Doctrines as these grown bold and publick, are a presage of some great distempers growing upon the common Body; That there are some inward and extraordinary calls to an Office, which owe an account of their truth and reality soley to that spirit which feels them. That onely Christ in Person is the lawfull and rightfull Governour of the Earth. That Magistracy stands not with Christian liberty. That, Nullus est Dominus Civilis dum est in peccato mortali. Where the Magistrate will not reform the Church, the people may. Every such Doctrine as dull and wooden as it may seem, contains (like the Trojane horse) armed men in the belly of it.

2. Extraordinary Eclipses of the superior Luminaries, (the Governors in Church and State) either as to the light of wisdom and counsel, or respect and reverence before the people. Before Gods petty day of judgement in a state, the Sun usually is turned into darkness, and the Moon into bloud; there is great contempt thrown upon the Person or Government of the Ruler, by libells and seditious speeches, and his chief Ministers are required as sacrifices to appease some popular fury and discontent.

2. Earth-

3. *Earthquakes in divers places.* I mean, a great many commotions and petty tumults among the populacy. These argue high dis-satisfactions. Such frequent breakings out in the body Politick, argue many noxious and dangerous humours therein, which (without the wise interpose of State-physitians) presage ruine to the whole. These and more signs (not proper for this place) are there, which are sufficient to the mind that hath wisdom; as for folly, it would not receive instruction, though one arose from the dead.

Secondly, We are further told, that by removing of the received Objection 2. Opinion of Prodigies and signs, we remove a main pillar, where-upon the faith of a Divine Providence [of a God, concern'd in all the affairs of the world] and that we hereby strengthen the hands of Atheism, and few pillours under the elbows of secure and sleepy wickedness.

I answer, *Its rather the way to make men Atheists to tell them, these are Gods signs of things which they see seldom or never come to pass.* All arguments brought in defence of a truth men are willing to free their minds of, if they doe not fully prove, doe hugely weaken and disparage it; like weak Physick, which if it drive not forth the ill humour, doth by accident exasperate it, and make the patient, worse: and therefore it is no way safe to trust so great and important an article of our faith, with so feeble and aery a proof as this is. If an Atheist can believe that the world came by chance into all this beauty and elegant order, and the severall sphears of beings to maintain so gratefull an harmony in their motions, without some great intelligence to give law and measure to them; He will more easily perswade himself, that things run by chance sometimes into discord, monstrousness, and deformity.

Thirdly, 'Tis further objected, that all the common and more familiar methods of action, appointed the creatures giving so excellent an account of themselves to a wise and considerate mind, it cannot readily be conceiv'd to what end any of these extraordinaries in Nature, can minister but to that of Divination of events future.

Though this be a most inconsequent and presumptuous reasoning, *sot.* [things must be for this end, for I know no other that they can serve] yet, because where the mind of man reacheth not the true causes or proper ends of any thing, it is easily tempted to take up in such vain and cheap resolves as a superstitious multitude or a guilty fear, may tender to it; and because most men are such *Gloriae animalia* as (like *Proteus*) to shift into any odd shape and form of opinion and conceit to free themselves when held with the knot of any difficult and perplex *Phænomenon* layd before them. I shall therefore propose those higher and more excellent ends of these irregular accidents, which may satisfie mens minds, and (as a real diamond doth its counterfeit) most effectually detect and disparage that little and mean end which vulgar opinion makes, them servants to [that of an unnecessary, and often hurtfull curiositie, in the knowledge of times reserv'd soley in Gods power and counsel.]

First, Then. They serve to awaken more gross and heavy minds into a sense of the Being, Providence, and greatness of God.

2 Pet. 3.

1 Of his Being. One account why Atheists live in a constant neglect and inobservance of the God of Nature, is this, [All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation] the constant and even harmony which nature makes, lulls men into a dull and sleepy inadvertency; whereas some harshness and discords now and then in the parts thereof (new and unwonted occurrences) are apt to awaken their dull and sleepy minds into a sense of some mighty power which runs through the world and commands the forces of Nature which way he pleaseth.

Pf. 58. 11.

Since we lost the favour of God we are greatly propense to loose the sense of Him: for if he observe a constant method in the works of Creation, the God of nature shall be lost and forgotten in the power of Nature: if, as in the works of Providence, He proceed by no rul'd cases, (never prescribe to himself) then he shall be eclips'd in chance and fortune: and therefore perhaps sometimes He acts so accountably, and consonantly to our notions, in the works of his providence, that men are forc'd to say, *Verily there is a God which judgeth in the Earth*: and sometimes so irregularly in the works of Nature that men are forc'd to cry out, *The Finger of God!* Were the works in Nature, alway layd out by the line of an even, and (every way) immutable law and order, men would be apt to think (though they could not make sense of that thought) that all was done by Nature; and should Monsters, Comets, Earthquakes, &c. turn quotidian, men would be tempted to conclude the world a great lottery, and all effects owing *soli fortuito Causarum concursui*: Whereas a wise intermixture of some irregularities puts men upon reflection, and gives them to understand that Natures ill shap'd letters at one time, are an assurance that she could not write so fairly and evenly as generally, had she not some Great Master to guide her hand, and bind in the powers of some causes apt to exorbitate and flie out.

Pf. 104. 10.

Pf. 107. 35.

Pf. 68. 4.  
Verul. Sap.  
Vet. fab. 6.

2. Of his Providence. Should not Rivers sometimes stand, and springs fayl, men would not be so fully assur'd, that it is God who sendeth the springs into the vallies, that it is he who watereth the Hills. Should there not happen some terrible Vulcans, and fiery eruptions, we should not awaken into a sense of that mighty Power, which keeps all that natural tinder in the bowels of the earth from catching fire before its appointed time: Did there not new springs break forth sometimes, from the usually driest breasts of our common Mother [deserts and wildernesses] we could not with the Psalmist, adore the power of God discover'd in turning the Wilderness into a standing water, and dry grounds into water springs. Besides the exorbitances of Natural cautes at sometimes, and their running (like unruly horses) out of that way (those lines which common Nature hath prescrib'd them) resolve us that their general stillness and order is owing to Him who rideth upon the Heavens, whose Wisdom and power moderates all their blind and impetuous forces: A truth, which the ancients coucht in their fable of the Gyant Typhon (which signifies swelling out)

out) bidding battel to (their most ancient Deity) Pan, or Nature, but bound up and restrain'd by him in Nets (as 'twere) of Adamant.

3. Of his admirable greatness. Upon the occurrence of any matters strange and extraordinary, Nature hath taught us to cast up our eyes and hands to heaven, in a kind of tacit acknowledgement that matters rare and wunderfull ow themselves to Him who is Δευτερός, the great wonder worker, who is accordingly to be acknowledg'd in them all. And therefore though we fear not a Comet or an Earthquake, yet may we thence take occasion to quicken ourselves to a Reverence and fear of that greatness which appointed them. The true spirit of Religion will not receive Metum, a fear of distrust, though the Earth remove, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; but yet readily entertains timorem, a fear of reverence, when it perceives the earth to be but shaken, (by an Earthquake) or the Mountains to break forth into a flame. As we must not loose our Philosophy in Religion, by a total neglect of second causes, and turning Superstitious; so neither must we loose our Religion in Philosophy, by dwelling on second causes, till we quite forget the First, and become profane. To cure Superstition by profaneness, is to burn an Idol with fire taken from the Altar.

Secondly, Some of these petty alterations in Nature, serve as a kind of types, Essays, Assurances of that Greater and more universal alteration thereof, at the consummation of the world. That we might not distrust a Resurrection, God hath youchsaft us (as Theodoret notes) πανατήσις αὐτίστως μημονά τὸ κρεψατα, many pretty imitations and natural Sermons thereof, as the rising again of decay'd plants from their roots in the spring, the return of herbs and trees from their dying seeds into life again. Thus the frightfull eruptions of fire from the earth, wonderfully eclipses of the lights of heaven, the strange fires sometimes discovered in the air, the mighty tremblings of the earth, may serve (like Hierusalem pourtra'd by the Prophet upon a tile) as little maps and imitations of that more dreadfull confusion which shall cover the whole face of Nature at the last day, and as a kind of præludia to that time when the sun shall be cloth'd with darkness, the heavens shall be on fire, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the Earth with all the works therein shall be burnt up.

Cæcilius the Heathen derided the Christian doctrine of a final dissolution of the works of Nature at the last day, with his quasi Naturæ divinis legibus constitutus ordo aeternus turbetur; as if ever the perpetual order of Nature which hath received its seal and sanction from the counsels of heaven, can ever be ruffled and disturb'd: Now these strange alterations in nature, are but prefaces to much stranger; and the breakings forth of mighty fires out of the earth sometimes give assurance that (like Uriah) it carries its own fate about it, such fiery materials, as will quickly reduce it to a condition beneath its first Chaos, in that day of vengeance wherein God will destroy the murderers and abusers of his servants, and burn up their polluted city.

Thirdly. God in them supplies the soul with such objects as He made it most

De Provid.  
Orat. 9.

Minut. Fel.

Longin.  
Heli "T. &c.  
§. 32.  
Id. §: 31.

most apt to contemplate and admire. In a work of Art (as Longinus observes) man admires the curiosity and accurateness; in a work of Nature, the vastness and magnificence thereof: because in the former, He looks for but τὸ ὄμοιον ἀνθρώπῳ, somewhat like man (the measure & subject of art) but in the latter, somewhat worthy of God: and further that if any thing occurre which is περίσσοξον, πέρια, καὶ ὡς τοῖς οὐκανός διαφορούμενον, strange, vast, and (in comparison with our selves) bigg with a kind of Divinity, φυσικὸς πότερος αἰδούσιος, we are carried with a kind of native instinct, to consider and attend unto it: and he instances accordingly in the eclipses of heaven, the vast ocean, the vulcanos of Etna; as objects which command the mind to wonder and ecstasy. [The Soul hereby gives silent testimony to it self, that it was made to contemplate and admire that God, with whom all the first exemplars of greatness, power, glory, beauty, dwell together, or whatsoever there is in the works of Art or Nature, in which there appear any rude touches and shadows of wonderfull and admirable.]

Now then as there are in Nature (the Art of God) those admirable curiosities, appearing in the elegant fabrick of the creatures, the mysterious anatomy of parts, and those more subtle and cryptick ways which Nature walks in, toward her designed ends, which affect not the duller and moreheedless part of the world, but supply the sons of Art with fresh and repeated wonders; so in these prodigious instances, the ruder sort of men (which carry their Souls in their eys) find somewhat to engage them to contemplate and admire. These works goe off from the common figures and measures of Nature, are great and vehement; and therefore, proper objects to call forth the soul into contemplation and admiration; which whilst it stands thus at gaze doth tacitly and interpretatively venerate that God who in all these strange Events, appears wonderfull in counsel and mighty in working.

In Fragm.  
Metaph.

Fourthly, Many of these Errata, (in the book of the Creature) lead us to an understanding of the evil of sin which hath made the creatures thus subject to vanity and miscarriage. Theophrastus hath noted that in the matter whereof natural things consist, there is πλάνη τὸ εχόμενον & δεχόμενον τὸ εὖ, much of it which is unwieldy, too stiffe and stubborn to be turned to the seal of Nature, to receive those signatures and im-presses, which are best, and primarily intended to be stampt upon it. A defect which escapt not the notices of many contemplative Heathens, who could not resolve themselves of the proper cause thereof [Divine malediction layd upon the creatures for the sin of man]

Fifthly, They serve to lead us into a more distinct knowledge of the works of Nature. Nature is the best Interpreter of it self; now (like tortur'd men) she then discovers her secrets, either when vex'd by Art in lesser bodies, or disturb'd by accident in greater. Comets, new Stars, monstrous Eclipses, Earth-quakes, Meteors, &c. all serve the knowledge of one mystery in Nature or other. The knowledge of Nature is greatly absolv'd, by our understanding [Quid fieri potest, & Quomodo] What can be done therein, and how it is done: the former

former knowledge we advance to especially by an attendance to *Natura libera, vel vinita*, Nature in its constant and more easy freedom of Operation, or as demeaning it self, under the constraints of Art. The latter knowledge we fairly arrive at by a regard to *Natura Dēvians*, Nature erring and running out of her more common road, because the Errours of Nature correct those *Idols* which the soul is easily abus'd with all, while attending solely to things common and usual, (whence it is apt to take up its maximes) and also because these are sometimes a kind of rude and imperfect pieces in Nature, and so serve (like a ship halfe built) to discover her silent processes, and more cryptick methods in the building up and compleating of her works.

And therefore if we had a more faithfull *History* of the *Anomals in Nature*, (the want whereof is owing not a little to the superstition of men, which stains all it toucheth) we might be soon able to see beyond the surface of those things, which as yet seem plac'd in the world, but to confound and pose us. But the evil is, that as the *History of Times*; is usually drawn up, so as it may minister not to truth but faction; the *History of Nature* so as to gratifie either interest or curiosity, so the *History of Præternatural occurrences*, as it may serve, wonder or superstition; not in so judicious and faithfull a relation of the critical circumstances of accidents, as to make a square basis whereupon to erect the steady principles of Philosophy.

Sixthly, Such unwonted occurrences give us to understand that the most common rules of natural operation are not without exception, nor her most known laws simply immutable; God is able to overthrow Nature by it self, by appointing one Natural cause to disturb and countermand the weaker efforts of another. He can cause that *ποχὸν τῆς φύσεως* Jams 3. 6. (in S. Jams's phrase) wheele of Nature to fire and destroy it self, by delivering it to the violent and disorderly motion of its several parts.

All the creatures are at God's foot, all their Orders and motions, Lib. i. De but the laws which his infinite wisdom appointed them unto. Ac- Civit. D.c.8, cordingly S. Austin speaking of the foremention'd prodigious *Phasis* of the Planet *Venus*, tell us, God would have men thence learn, *Se Deo non debere præscribere*, that they ought not to prescribe to God; and that he is able, *Naturam in longè aliud quam nobis cognitum est vertere & mutare*, command Nature into a quite different order and posture from what our shorter thoughts can reach unto; and, that *Voluntas Conditoris conditæ rei cuiusque natura est*, the nature of every thing is but the present will of its maker. As all arbitrary and contingent Agents and events, seem in a sort necessary, with respect to the knowledge of God; so all agents (as to us) necessary, are mutable and arbitrary, consider'd with respect to the power of God. All the creatures are but so many earthen vessels, bearing upon them the arbitrary figures and impressions of their mighty Former.

Seventhly, Tis usually added, that all these exorbitances in Nature, serve to foyle and set off the general beauty and elegancy of its works. All that *Ὥλη ἐκ πλήθειας εἰδεῖ* (in the language of Plotinus) matter not fully subdued and layd hold upon by Form, doth but enhance the

value of all those comely proportions elsewhere discovered in the Creation.

These great ends (and greater no doubt are some of those which lie hidden in the recesses of the Divine Mind) offering so fair and easy an account of these irregular accidents (if at least we may so term events falling out by as necessary, though less known and common a rule and law of Nature, as its daily labours) to receive them, (without any Interpreter to explain their language) as a kind of Divine messengers to bring us news from Heaven, and (as the Angel to Daniel) to make us understand what shall befall our people hereafter, is to weary our selves to catch a shadow, and like Adonis to fall in love onely with the reflections of our own face, phancy, and abus'd imagination, and to be vain without any Apology in the world.

## SECT. VII.

### *An Answer to the several Scriptures alledged in favour of the adverse Opinion.*

The first Scripture Mat. 16. 3. speaking of signs of times, answer'd by shewing the great disparity of signs, things signified, the times spoken of, and the Persons spoken to, from those concern'd in this Argument. The second Scripture [Joel 2.30, 31.] Vindicated. The day of the Lord how understood in Scripture, mighty changes in the creation, in prophetical Scriptures, to be understood mystically, and why. The Prophecy of Joel, how understood, and when accomplished. The third Scripture. [Luk. 21. 11.] answered largely.

Having thus driven this Opinion from all its little holds, it remains now that we beat it from its Fort Royal [the Authority of Sacred Scripture, which seems to speak favour for it]. Now the first place of Scripture, I take notice of, prest to the service thereof, is that speech of our Saviour,

Mat. 16. 3.

*Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; and can ye not discern the signs of the times?*

In which words our Saviour intimates, that as God in the works of Nature, hath consulted the conveniences of common life, by appointing some certain signs of the seasons ensuing, so hath he also in his providence assisted the happiness and advantage of our civil and spiritual life, by ordaining some signs of the times, whence we may be able to make a Crisis of the issue of things: and that it is a great instance of folly in men, that they are such able Interpreters of the various lines in the face of heaven, but very uncapable, and stupidly inobservant of those rational signs and intimations of the state and condition of the present or future times of the Church. Now then what signs of times can more plausibly and rationally be assigned: then

then prodigies, which the heaviest men can observe, and the wisest cannot readily define to what end some of them (Comets especially and New stars) can serve, unless to point out to the world a difference of times?

I answer Scripture (like over prest grapes) gives a very ungrateful tast and sense, when prest beyond its easie and native intent and purpose; that so the present Text is, will appear, if these four particulars be duly attended unto.

First, The great *disparity of signs*; the signs whereof the Text is understood, were,

1. *Signa moralia*, signs of a moral Nature, such as were the gradual lessening of the lustre and glory of the Jewish Polity and pedagogy; by the ceasing of prophecy, the absence of the heavenly fire, the arke of the Covenant, the Shechinah, the Oracles by *Urim and Thummim*, from the second Temple; the lapsing of the government from Kings to Dukes, from Dukes to the *Sanhedrin*, from them to the Romanes; there having been no Kings types of Christ after *David* and *Solomon*, (except *Hezekiah* be admitted a candidate for that honour) This vanishing splendour of the face of Moses (that Oeconomy whereof he was the minister) was a sign that the *Sun of Righteousness* was now a rising, under whom a state of more spiritual and inward glory was shortly to obtain.

2. *Signa predicta*, signs of times long before spoken of, and of sacred and scriptural institution; such as were, the departing (in a good degree at least) of the *Sceptre from Judah*, the near expireing of *Daniel's weeks*, the coming of *John the Baptist in the spirit of Elias*, the generale expectation of the *Messias* about that time rais'd up in the minds of men.

3. *Signa miraculosa*, the mighty signs and wonders (every way equal to those upon which the credit of the Mosaical dispensation was built) which attended the person and doctrine of our Saviour, *Jo. 10. 25.* and to which (as his visible witnesses) he sometimes made his *Mat. 11. 5.* appeal.

Whereas the *signs of times*, I contend against, are neither of any moral nature, (speaking not to the Reason, but the phancy of men) neither were they ever foretold, (God doth not now appear so far to value the world as to usher any change in the affairs thereof, by the promises of a Prodigie) nor are they miraculous, the power of Nature (in such a coincidence of causes) being able to reach the production of any of these prodigious signs.

2. The *disparity of things signified*; All the forementioned signs were tokens for good, but as the blushings of the Evening before the dawning of that happy day, wherein, a state big and good enough for the title of the *Kingdom of Heaven*, was to take place. Besides, they were matters of no narrow and private reference (the fall of some Great Person, or the commencing of some petty war) but of a catholick concern, such wherein the felicities of Jew and Gentile were bound up, (matters big enough for the solemnity of a sign to preface and bring on. The things signified were also matters of

huge importance [as, that Jesus was the promised Messiah, that all the shadows, and rites of the law, were to expire and conclude (like the *Phænix* in a nest of spices) in the graces, truths and glories of the Gospel-state; that the *wall of partition* was now to be taken away, and all Nations to own themselves brethren under one common Father] These things, all men were concern'd to know and believe, and therefore God taught them by great signs, as well as excellent Preachers. Whereas Prodigies are suppos'd the signs of wrath and judgements, which yet often surprize men (not unfitly therefore itil'd *Gods arrows*, which give a fatal, but withall a suddain and a silent wound) and besides are presum'd to come forth to serve some worldly and little ends and interests, which men easily perswade themselves, Heaven hath espoused with as much passion as themselves.

3. The *disparity of the times spoken of* (in that Text) from our own: The times there intended, were times rather present then future: times wherein the Mosaical Oeconomy, (brought on with mighty signs and wonders) was to determine; Times wherein the Church was to be put under an immutable and excellent form of administration (itil'd therefore the *last times* in Scripture) Now necessary it was that some remarkable signs of those times should be given forth in scripture, that so the age wherein that mighty change should fall, might the better acquiesce therein, and succeeding generations might have the more secure a faith of the exhibition of the true *Messias*, because observing all the *signs of the times* to which he was promised, exactly conspiring in those wherein he was exhibited. Whereas all the changes which chequer and vary the times of the World now, are of no name and reckoning, if compar'd with this. The world is so acquainted with civil changes, that I should expect a Prodigie rather to give notice of some days of peace and settled tranquillity (to which the world is the greatest stranger).

4. The *Disparity between the Persons to whom those words were spoken, and our selves*; The Jews were a People so us'd to signs, that the Apostle tells us, 1 Cor. 1. 22. *the Jews require a sign*. And it was the vulgar opinion amongst them, that as all extraordinary Prophets were to seal their commission with a miracle, so all events extraordinary were to be foreshewn by a sign. Hence the Jews come to our Saviour with that bold demand, *What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest all these things?* Jo. 2. 18. and the Disciples (upon the credit of this common conceit) no sooner hear our Saviour foretell strange events in reference to Hierusalem, and the Temple, but they presently ask him [*what shall be the sign, when all these things shall come to pass?*] God perhaps gave them signs, to assure them that the evils which befell them arose not out of the dust, but came upon them from the fore-appointing counsels of heaven; and to awaken their dull and worldly minds into a lively sense of his justice and providence. But now in the broad day light of the Gospel, 'tis expected that we should not need awaking by any such monitors into a sense and awe of the Divine Majesty. We must now believe without a sign,

Mat. 8. 11.

Mat. 13. 4.

sign, and derive our repentance not from mighty Earthquakes and prodigies, but an ingenious and understanding sense of sin.

I suppose now that the light of what hath been said upon this Text of Scripture, is sufficient to chase away all shadow of any argument from it, to abet any such signs of times as our adversaries plead it in favour of. And what though we should be forc'd to return a Non liquet in reference to the true ends of Comets and new stars sometimes discovered to the World? must we therefore conclude them but a sort of more glorious impertinencies in Nature, unless they serve our curiosity, by being made signs of times? Is it such news to hear so short a creature as man is, past his depth? We find the Almighty posseing of Job, almost through every science; In Geometry, Knowest thou the ballancings? of the clouds? whereupon are the foundations of the Earth fasten'd? or who hath laid the corner stone? In Natural Philosophy, Hast thou entred into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the deep? hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? In Opticks, Where is the way where light dwelleth, and as for darkness, where is the place thereof? by what way is the light parted, which scattereth the East wind upon the earth? In Astronomy, canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season, or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? Knowest thou the Ordinances of heaven, canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth? In Arithmetick, who can number the clouds in wisdom? In Natural History, knowest thou the time, when the wild goats of the rock bring forth, &c. God will have some things in Nature unsearchable, to hide pride from man, and to discover himself to him: for it must needs be presumed that all these mysteries came forth from, and are comprehended by some First Mind, and mighty Wisdom.

We are urg'd next with the words of the Prophet Joel, chap. 2. So chap. 3. 30, 31.

I will shew wonders in the heavens, and in the Earth, bloud and fire and pillars of smoak;

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into bloud, before the great and terrible day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord is near, the Sun and the Moon shall be darkned, and the Stars shall withdraw their shineing: From which words those Act. 2. 19, 20. are borrowed.

To which may be added because of a likeness of expression that place. Luk. 21. 25, 26.

And there shall be signs in the Sun and in the Moon, upon Earth distress of Nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring,

Mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the Earth, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

In which former scripture, by the Day of the Lord, we are to understand some special day of vengeance; it being usual in sacred Writ, (as some of the Hebrew Doctours observe) to intitle days eminent for any unusual expressions of Divine favour or displeasure, Days of the Lord: whereas we find this day preface'd and foretold by such prodigious occurrences as easily resolve themselves into causes natural.

Jer. 4. 23.  
 Ezek. 32. 7, 8.  
 Joel. 2. 10.  
 Isai. 13. 10.  
 34. 4.  
 Ezek. 30. 18.  
 Rev. 6. 12.  
 8. 13.  
 Isai. 24. 19.  
 20.  
 \* Locutiones  
 istae de caligine  
 solis & lunæ  
 multis in locis  
 reperiuntur,  
 nusquam au-  
 tem sensu  
 physico sed  
 sensu figurato.  
 In Mat. c. 24.  
 com. 27.

I answer, First Learned expositors generally understand those places not in any literal sense, but receive them all as so many prophetic schemes of speech, (instances whereof, are of most familiar occurrence in the Prophets) expressive of some wonderfull evils shortly to afflict the world: as they do also (on the contrary) the promises of a new heaven and a new earth, the increase of the light of the sun and of the moon, &c. but as so many figurative expressions of some white and gladsom days shortly to succeed. Particularly the learned \* Grotius is so secure of a figurative sense of such places, that he tells us, they are never to be expounded (in all scripture) to any other. And indeed should we expound them literally, we should soon honour the falls of great men, or destruction of cities, with greater (or as great) wonders, as attended the crucifixion of our blessed Saviour. Besides, what Histories ever mention any such astonishing alterations in the frame of Nature, as the literal sense of these places would introduce a faith of?

Now the Prophets chose thus to deliver themselves, for some or all of these Reasons;

1. Because it was the custom of the Eastern Nations, to describe great and mighty storms and troubles in a state, in such phrases as these, the darkning of the heavens, falling of the stars, shaking of the earth, flying away of the Mountains, &c.

2. Because these being the most remarkable and glorious bodies in the world, terrible alterations in them, seem the most proper representatives of mighty changes and alterations in kingdoms.

3. Because the terrible judgements of God upon the Babylonians, Egyptians, Jews and obstinate Gentiles (set forth in such expressions) were but *supremi judicii specimina*, little images and types of the last and dreadfull judgement; and therefore not unsightly character'd by the terrors and horours which shall usher that last and great Day.

4. Because these are expressions mighty and vehement, and so very expressive of, and suitable unto, that hot and vigorous impression which the Spirit of Prophecy made upon the minds and imaginations of those holy men which were acted by it.

5. Because that anxiety and perplexity of mind, which should attend the plagues coming on men, should be as great almost, as if they saw the eye of heaven (the sun) put out, and the earth to tremble under them, &c.

If. 7. 20.  
Jer. 47. 5.

Now, (in this figurative sense) the words were accomplished in their first and original intention, when that great misery was brought upon the earth by Nabuchodonosor; and they receiv'd a further degree of accomplishment (as S. Peter intimates, Act. 2. 19.) under the Romanes, when the land which was but shaven before by Gods hired Razor, had an utter baldness brought upon it (to use the expression of the Prophet,) and it shall have its fulfilling in the outmost latitude of its senie, at the day of judgment (of which some Interpreters solely understand it) Propecies have their *Gradus & scalus complementi*, (as the Lord Bacon speaks) the last day only is that true πλήρωμα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

Xerxes

*Age* fulness of time, wherein they shall be completely fulfilled. God often draws similar and parallel lines of confusion, over different times and places, whips many stubborn children with the same rod, and therefore prophesies of the same vengeance may have their repeated accomplishments.

Secondly, Some learned men understand in these places a real and literal darkning of these great bodies of light, though arising not from any common and natural, but an extraordinary and supernaturall cause. The reasons of which exposition, I shall remit to their proper place; which (if they appear satisfactory) nothing can be thence concluded in favour of presages by these Prodigies, which are but some more unusual effects lying hid in the powers of natural Agents, and sometimes exerting themselves.

There is one place of Scripture more which may seem to some to require (perhaps to refuse) an answer, viz. that Luke 21. 11. where our Blessed Saviour (foretelling that large line of confusion to be stretched out upon the Holy City, and whole nation of the Jews, as as a precedent signe thereof, tells his Disciples, Great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences, &c. now earthquakes have been numbred with Prodigies natural.

I answer, First, When God hath once sealed them by his sanction and institution, Prodigies natural may be regarded as the signs of events arbitrary and supernatural. Gods bow (without a string) in the heavens, is to us a signe that the world need never fear perishing by any such fatal arrow as once was shot out of the clouds, [A universal deluge] although it be owing to a natural and necessary cause; as being [by Gods institution] advanc'd to the dignity of a signe of grace and favour. Thus when God had told the people that, as an expression of his great displeasure against them, for asking of a king, He would send thunder and rain (things in themselves natural, except it be said that the peculiar condition of that season and climate, made them approach to a miracle) it was a religious fear with which <sup>1 Sam. 12.</sup> the people entertain'd their coming. God may appoint the crowing of a cock (at such an instant of time) to be one of his signs. So, when the Disciples had asked a signe of their Lord, when all his predictions concerning the Temple and Nation, should come to pass, and he had mentioned (amongst others) Great earthquakes, they were then prefer'd a kinde of Sacraments and prophetick symbols of the terrible shaking of the Jewish worship and polity now approaching. And indeed when the great wickednes and security of that generation had merited, that that fatal time should fall as a snare upon all them that then dwelt on the earth: such signs as had a natural cause seemed the most proper indications thereof; as which (because happening at that time) might sufficiently warn and alarm the Christians, and lull faster asleep the more Atheistical and incredulous part of that age; appearing to them, but the more unusual works of interrupted nature. To conclude now, that because some earthquakes, of Gods appointing, were his signs, therefore all are, is as inconsequent an inference as this; the bread and wine are signs and seals in the

the Sacrament, because stampt with a divine institution; therefore all bread and wine may challenge the same degree of reverence and regard from us.

Secondly, These earthquakes had such characters upon them as might sufficiently inclose and distinguish them from the common issues of disturbed nature; As,

*Amos 1. 1.*

*1 King. 19. 11.* 1. Their greatness, the Text styles them great earthquakes. It is like-  
ly there appeared in them more then the bare force and impatience of some crude and imprisoned vapours. We read of an earthquake in the days of *Uzziah*, so great and terrible, that we finde it made an Epochæ in the Jewish histories. *Josephus* reports that some furlongs of the mountains about *Jerusalem* were rent asunder, and cities swallowed up by it. If *Aristotle* styled the *Celtæ μανιάτες*, mad men; because an earthquake would sooner make a mountain tremble then them: certainly the title is too little for those which are not impressive to some fear of God, when they see him thus let loose the powers and forces of natural agents upon them.

2. Their multitude [there were earthquakes in divers places] Nature ran often against her bias in the same instances, that so the effect might not be intituled to the rub of some casual impediment; but to the hand of heaven over-ruling and directing it. And should I here grant (which I see no reason to do) that many and great earthquakes in a continent especially, are a signe of some approaching evil, our adversaries could advance little upon the concession, both because the example will I believe be found a heteroclite, and to stand alone in the History of Nature, as also because I conceive they would not adventure to compare a monster or fiery meteor with the terrors of so many earthquakes (generally singled out in Scripture, as the monitours of the Divine power and majesty)

3. Their dismal attendants. The creatures would not nourish such rebels against heaven as were then upon earth. [there were famines] the air refused to cherish and refresh them. [there were pestilences] the eyes of heaven shrunk away from such hated objects [the lights of heaven were darkned] the earth groaned and staggered in a sort, under her vile burden [there were earthquakes in divers places] so that these signs might, as letters do, speak that to a pious fear, in conjunction, which they could not have done in separation.

4. Their Divine prediction. [There shall be earthquakes] and each *1 Sam. 10. 3. 7.* earthquake was a signe, not as *Eventus mirabilis*, but as *Eventus praedictus*. Saul his meeting of three men, carrying three kids, and three loives, and a bottle of wine, when he parted from *Samuel*, might have been received with the slight and passing notices of a casual and common accident, had it not been foretold by the Prophet, as a signe of Gods presence with him. And thus any of these earthquakes might perhaps have been received but with the common wonder which any rare and prodigious occurrence calls forth; but because foretold, it was a signe when it came to pass, that that eye of prescience which could foresee an event which held of no certain cause, did with as much truth and certainty foresee that fearfull desolation approaching,

ing, whereof it was appointed a signe and symbol. So that this place of Scripture appears to lend as little strength and support to that weak and falling cause, which seeks for confidence and assistance from it, as the foregoing.

From what hath been hitherto spoken concerning Prodigies Natural, it may appear that ( howsoever they may possibly serve as a pretty ground for the fancy of a Poet or Oratour, which are to apply themselves to that part of the soul, which doth *parum sapere*) they are too sandy and sinking a foundation to build any religious conclusions upon: we must not introduce *scenam in vitam, nec fabulas in fidem*. Pious frauds are a kinde of *feet of clay*, which will at last deceive and sink under that weighty body of religion, which ever relies upon them for support.

## CHAP. III.

*Concerning Prodigies Preternatural.*

*Prodigies Preternatural, what. The observation of them, proved a hurtfull vanity: The profane opinion the Heathen had of God; upon the presence of any of them, noted from their writings. The evil influence they have upon the minds of men now: A double account given of the prevalence of this perswasion. The conceit of Gods giving forth some shadows and pictures of his great works before he set about them, toucht upon. The Authours judgement of Apparitions delivered in five Conclusions. An enquiry into the truth of the Prodigies mentioned in Josephus. The wonderfull Prodigies mentioned in Ovid and the Sibylline Oracles, whence taken.*

All the Extraordinaries in the world which fall out by no steady and certain rules and causes ( Such as are the approach of a strange and unknown kinde of fish to the shore, the firing of houses by lightning, disorderly ebbs and flows of the sea, some spots as it were of bloud appearing in stones or statuas, and a hundred such like ) to serve as I can the distinctness of the Discourse I style *Prodigies Preternatural*. All which as soon as fastning upon my hand, I shall shake off ( as the Apostle did the venomous beast) and deliver the observation of them to that smoke and darkness, whence it did at first proceed, that my Reader nor my self derive no infection from so hurtfull and headless a vanity.

i. I style the observation of such things a *very hurtfull vanity*. The regarding of these and the like occurrences as presages of evil, served heretofore, but to cherish in men, this deformed thought of God, that ( all things being subject to the law of an insuperable Fate and a blinde necessity ) all he could do, was onely to foresee an evil, and so, to piece out his power with his courtesie, by these and the like accidents, to awaken men to shift for themselves, and as they could, to get out of the way, or to strengthen themselves by resolution when

any blinde and fatal causes were ready to rush furiously upon them. A matter which may appear from the words of *Ovid*, where (speaking of *Venus*) he thus delivers himself,

*Ovid. Metam.*  
l. 15.

*Verba jacit, Superosque movet, qui rumpere quanquam  
Ferrea non possunt veterum decreta Sororum,  
Signa tamen luctus dant haud incerta futuri.  
Arma ferunt inter, &c.*

And to a like purpose *Silius Italicus*, in those words,  
*Heu vani monitus, frustraque morantia Parcas  
Prodigia! heu Superi fatis certasse minores!*

*Invictæ leges  
necessitatis,  
pectus alioqui  
ab amentia  
remotum, Pro-  
digia ista ju-  
stæ æstimati-  
one perpendere  
passæ non  
sunt,*

Now Poets, (though in a matter of History they usually follow *ingenium proprium*, and stretch out by the force of imagination a matter which shrinks of it self to a short and simple narration, yet) in a matter of opinion commonly follow *ingenium temporum*, and take liberty to express freely the common thoughts of the times wherein they live. That this was one of those gross phantasms which abused the minds of men, in the darkness of Gentilism, may appear more fully from the words of a more severe and serious Writer, *Valerius Maximus*, who having told us of the several strange Prodigies, as the finger of God held up to warn *Pompey* (before his encounter with *Cesar*) or to declare his fall; He infers from them, that the Deity evidenced [*Se Pompeii errorem inhibere voluisse*,] a great willingness to have prevented the error and rashness of *Pompey*, but onely the insuperable laws of Fate would not permit him (though otherwise a person sober and advised enough) to weigh all those forewarnings in the balances of counsel and consideration.

And if the Opinion concerning presages by such or the like occurrences, do not now comfort and abet any such base persuasions concerning God, in some minds, it is well: sure I am, if they do not give men to think that God is under the power of Fate, yet they little less then assure that Events are: For either the intimations by such kinde of signs are (as the shadows of the mountains) ineffectual, moveable, and vain; and then, why do men at all regard them? or they are certain and undoubted; and if so, they place the Event beyond the redress of counsel and endeavour, and they call upon men onely *fortiter ferre*, to ride out the tempest approaching with as much courage and resolution as they can. (the evils, both to the state and religion, in the womb of which opinion, swell so visibly out, that it is needless, by any further argument, to rip it up and lay them forth to common view and notice.)

Besides, the Opinion greatly tends to lessen and degrade the Majesty of Heaven in our thoughts, while it prefers any such weak and pitifull occasions to the repute of Gods trumpets to give notice that he is now going forth to some great act of justice upon the world: it aims also directly to a lessening of our faith of the Divine Goodness and Kindness, while it teacheth us to imagine we discover a Fury in every strange issue of Providence: and to conclude it is mercy rather which is Gods strange work (the black ensigns of wrath and vengeance being continually hung out in one unusual accident or other)

other) It tends also to leaven the minds of men with sowe thoughts of Providence, as if designed to bereave men, not onely of happiness but the hopes and shadows thereof, and (as Benjamin did his mother) first to pain and torture them by mighty fears, and then to kill them by some great evil;

---- *Sic cœca futuri*

*Mens hominum fati, liceat sperare timenti.*

Finally, the Opinion doth make even good men too much to concern themselves in the affairs, and issues of things in this worthless and giddy world; to stretch themselves into Gods line, by inquiries after things wrapt up in futurity; and fills them too full of vain hopes or fears, to take up with composed and thankfull minds in that present portion which the hand of Providence deals out to them.

2. The observation of any such objects of common wonder, as presages, is also a groundless, headless vanity. The person that entertains his thoughts and studies much with them, gives (like those in that famine. 2 Kings 6.) a great price for an *asses head*. The Opinion (like the image of Nebuchadne~~z~~<sup>r</sup>ar) while it pretends to a *head of gold*, to promise Oracles and the knowledge of futurities, it stands for ought I can discover; but upon these two weak feet of clay,

1. *Narrow and scanty observation*; Men (it may be) have heretofore observed some few evils to tread close upon the heels of these or the like Prodigies, and therefore are easily perswaded that they were ushered by them; and they can never after shew themselves, but it is presumed they come forth to deliver some sad and ungrateful message. It is this also hath given credit to the observation of some, as *auspicious*, others as *inauspicious* days in the life of some great Persons, especially, viz. the observation of some happy or unhappy Events which the womb of such a morning hath perhaps twice or thrice brought forth unto men. As there are *lusus Naturæ*, of which before; so (be it spoken with reverence) there are *lusus Providentiaæ*: God is pleased to display his multifarious Wisdom in the many pretty varieties in Nature; and seems delighted with some pleasant constancies and uniformities in the works of Providence; whereof the sending of many great blessings or afflictions upon a person, just on such a day of the week, or returning year, is an especial instance; and this perhaps to try whether we be such *men in understanding* as not to suffer any distrust of his providence to break in upon us upon such a day, or after such accidents, because of some little disasters formerly befalling us then, more then at another time.

Psal. 110. 3.

2. *Weak and childish dislike of things*; Objects and Persons we conceive a kinde and courteous Opinion of, we can easily perswade our selves come forth with good tidings; we can readily look for an emblem of peace from the lovely dove. But where matters ungrateful fall before us, we usually serve our little hatreds, by deriving upon them the Opinion of being ill abodelements, and we quickly conceit, that they come about us (like the hated birds of night), against a time of mourning. For we may observe that the

2 Sam. 18.27.

occurrences to which imagination hath affixed the Opinion of their being ill Omens, are generally such as we shrink from, and follow with dislike, as the firing of houses by lightning, monstrous and deformed births, dreadfull eclipses, apparitions in the air, strange voices heard in the night, earthquakes, bloody waters, &c. We hate these things, and therefore avenge our selves of them, as we can, by a vain conceit, that they prophesie onely evil things concerning us. This Opinion then having no better support to trust unto, it were to over-value it, to put forth any great strength of reason, to throw it down.

Onely perhaps some contemplative Persons may perswade themselves, that the foundation of this Opinion is not laid so much upon the surface, as I would make my Reader to believe; for as there was a pretty conceit among some of the Ancient and more mystical sort of Philosophers, that all things in the upper and intelligible world, were limned forth in some parallel instances and similar figures here below, and that τὰ νοντὰ, matters intelligible were τὰ τὸν αἰδηνὸν πληρώματα, but the true fillings up of things sensible, which carry but some general and rude lines and images of them; thus some persons seem strongly perswaded, that all the greater works of God are pourtrayed, and shadowed out first in some litt'e pictures and images of them, and that therefore many strange accidents are but οντά τὸν μελόντων, and to be received as a kinde of shadows of things to come, & as a sort of καρδεῖγματα ἀρινπα, exemplars and types of some great and unusual work to follow after. Thus the sinking of the Lambeth Ferry-boat with the Arch-Bishops coach-horses, and coach-men, to the bottom of the Thames, Sept. 19. 1633. the very first day he removed from Fulham to Lambeth, was (saith one) no doubt a presage of his own and the Arch-Bishopricks sinking through his pride and violence: (with as good reason may I add, that their swimming again at last, was a signe that the function should at last appear above water.) But I believe it will appear to the most altogether unnecessary to bestow much breath to break this pretty bubble, which hath nothing but wind therein, and will break and refute it self, by its own airy, unstable and transparent principles: though perhaps with some (that know not to distinguish between an argument and a similitude) the conceit may appear of more value and moment.

*Apparitions whether (in the air) of Armies of cities, or by any particular application of Angels good or bad in a way of counsel and conference (reckoned among Prodigies Preternatural, no power transcendent to created being exerted in them) may perhaps appear in this place, argument big enough to deserve a more serious and particular examination. In which undertaking, I may hope for pardon, if (standing in no better light) I hit the butt though not the white, and deliver what may seem most consistent with sobriety and approach nearest to the truth.*

All that I think fit to offer in this Argument, shall be disposed under these five Propositions;

First, There have been some such apparitions as these mentioned. I readily grant that this Argument (like an enchanted house) is full of

Authour of  
the Breviat. of  
the life of  
Arch-Bish.  
Laud. p. 35.

Propos. i.

of Phantasms, and delusive images; and that many stories of this Nature there are which like Spectres are filled out in shew with body and substance, which when we come to handle and examine by making search into their grounds and evidence, we shall find them vanishing into the ayr of common report, or the single testimony of some superstitious or melancholy imaginant. And therefore (I know) many men are not at all impresive to any such relations, but look upon them all but as (apparitions indeed) things which never advanc'd nearer to realities, then the images of a dream.

Look as in Religion, some men (to present God but with a flattering faith) take great pleasure to invent new mysteries therein, to fancy a *Bādō*, somewhat inexplicable in every article thereof, till they have made it a contradiction to the most natural maximes and easy sense of our minds, and a scandal to men that can discourse; so others are very busy in filling up every depth, and removing every real mystery therein, till they have left no image or footstep of its unsearchable Authour, thereupon thus it comes to pass in the matters of providence, some men are hugely taken with mysterics therein, delighted to hear and relate *πικρότερον* somewhat new and strange, their *pia Mater* is alway big with some religious *Legend*, or *prophecy*, to obtrude upon the easy world as a divine discovery. Others again would remove all prodigies, apparitions, and what ever goes off from the figures and measures of common and ordinary, and know not to admit a perswasion of any thing, of whose causes, ends or examples, they are not aware.

*Lucian commends this temper in Epicurus, Democritus, Metrodorus.* In *Alexand.*

that if any thing rare and wonderfull, fell before their consideration, they had put on *ἀδημαρτίννυ γνῶμην*, a resolution as inflexible as adamant to endeavour a solution thereof, and its reduction to the proper ends and causes: which if they were able to doe, well and good; but if not, to arrest all further search and wonder with this sentence, *Ἄειδος δέ τις καὶ γνέσις ἀδυνάτον*, it is a lie, and impossible to be at all. (An easy art to maintain the repute of understanding men!) And we shall not seldom find men (especially such as are arrived at no great experience of themselves or things) advancing the length of their own understanding and experience (like as our Einglish King did his arme) the common standard and measure of the truth or falsehood of things; an instance of which temper appears in their slow and heavy motion to a faith of such things (apparitions among the rest) whose natures, causes, ends or patterns fall not within their compass. But certainly as to be of a waxen faith, impresive to any narrations of this nature, is an instance of softness and superstition, so an obstinate and pertinacious incredulity, retains a little to Atheism, because removing one of the greatest and most pregnant arguments of a Deity, and gives cause of suspicion that the Person hath *ingenium difficiliter sanabile* in Religion, which (as we may observe) is so managed, as to suppose men candid and ingenuous, such as will fit down with high probabilities, where the condition of the things to be believed, admits not evidence and de-

Cardan. De  
Rer. Variet.  
I. 14. c. 69.  
& I. 15. c. 78.  
Gros. Magic.  
de spectris.

Propos. 2.  
Joseph. de  
Bel. Jud.  
I. 7. c. 12.

Hebr. 11.  
35, 36.

I Book ch. 5.  
ver. 2.

Romphæa scil.  
de caelo Urbi  
imminens,  
flamma in  
Templo visa,  
fores Templi  
sponte aperta,  
currus & ar-  
matæ phalan-  
ges conspectæ  
in nubibus,  
&c.

Grot. in loc.

monstration. The stories of all times are full of relations of such things as these, and therefore unbelief in this particular, is guilty of the rudeness of giving the lie to the world. They which have itching ears for such stories may have them sufficiently scratcht by Cardanus, Grosius, and other writers in this curious argument.

Secondly, It seems probable that some Apparitions in the ayr have been intended the Monitors of some judgement approaching. I shall instance but in two examples; One mentioned by Josephus, who tells us that a little before the destruction of Hierusalem by the Romane army [ἀπομένει τὸν πόλεμον διάταξος τῷ νεφῶν] there appeared amongst other prodigies chariots and armed companies of horsmen issuing out of the clouds, and intercepting the heavens with the multitude of their troops, which was received by him and others (not so drunk with pride and opinion as the rest) a representation (ὡς ἐν πίπω) of the marching forth of the great Lord of hosts with all warlike appoyntments to take vengeance of that rebellious city and nation.

Our other example shall be taken from an Authour credited by Apostolical citation, the writer of the book of Maccabees, who speaking of Hierusalem, thus delivers himself,

*It happened that through all the city, for the space of almost 40. days, there were seen horsmen running in the ayr, in cloth of gold, and armed with lances like a band of Soldiers;*

*And troops of horsmen in array, encountering one against another, with shakeing of shields, and multitude of pikes and drawing of swords, and casting of darts, and glittering of golden ornaments, and harness of all sorts. After the mention of which apparition, we may read there what a scene of woes and tragedies the City was made by the Armies of Antiochus.*

Now I think we may discover some probable and darker characters of divine signs upon these examples, but especially the first; And that,

1. Because our Saviour prophesied that the desolation of that people, should be presag'd by fearfull sights, and great signs from heaven, Luk. 21. 11. a place which our expositours generally conceive fulfilled in that and other prodigious accidents related by Josephus, (and subscrib'd unto by Eusebius) as the atrati & deformes nuncii of so fearfull a destruction as ensued.

2. Because the destruction of Hierusalem was a kinde of visible propheey, and type of the final destruction of the world: now that the sign and thing signified might the more exactly touch; as at the last day, the heavens shall be on fire, and the earth with all its works be burnt up, and the whole Creation feel its final and most dreadfull pangs and throws; so the destruction of Hierusalem was usher'd by its οβητερο, fearfull sights, mighty Earthquakes, a fiery sword, a flame in the Templo: And as at the last day, the Angels shall be the Ministers of his justice, and increase the terrors of his coming, by attending the Judge of quick and dead, (Mat. 25. 31.) so this judgement upon Hierusalem came with observation, and the solemnity of Angelical apparitions (represented by chariots, and armed companies, suitably to the words

words of the Psalmist concerning them. The Chariots of God are Ps. 68. 17. twenty thousand, even thousands of Angels) In short, some of the Prodigies preceding the fates of Hierusalem, seem such equal and proportion'd representatiyes, of those more terrible disguizes which the face of nature must put on, at that last and great Day, that the so call'd Sibylline Oracles, make choice of many of them to describe the horrors of it by,

*Cum visi fuerint cœli stellantis in Oris  
Nocturni gladii, casus ad solis & ortus,  
Pulvis & è cœlo terram descendet in omnem.  
Protinus & medio cursu, lax aurea solem  
Deseret, & terram fulgenti lumine luna  
Sanguincis guttis stellantibus irradiebat,  
Signaque saxa dabunt, & in alta prælia nube  
Cernetis peditumque equitumque sonantibus auris.*

Orac. Sibyl.  
l. 3.

And lib. 4.

*Enses atque tubæ simul, & sole Exidente  
Terribilem sonitum, mugitumque audiet omnis  
Mundus.*

Of which and the like passages therein occurring, some (presuming upon the pretended antiquity of those Oracles) conceive the strange Prodigies related by Ovid (not as an Historian but a Poet) lib. 15. Metamor. to be but an imitation; so great the agreement between them both in words and matter.

Thirdly, We shall observe that Gods works of a more catholick concern, have been ushered with some lighter essays to, and representations of them: thus the several appearances of God in the shape and figures of a Man, are commonly receiv'd as the *præludia*, (a Kind of μηναὶ τελεῖαι) to that great mystery of the incarnation. The general conversion of the Gentiles was as it were essay'd in the particular conversions now of a person, and then of a family to the Jewish Church. The universal conflagration of the world seems limn'd forth in the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; That mighty storm of vengeance which fell upon Hierusalem and the Jewish Politie, was prefac'd (by some lesser drops) the many miseries, which our Saviour stiles ἀρχὴ ὁδίων, the beginning of sorrows: and those judgements of an unusual make and character, which sometimes overtake more publick and notorious criminals, seem a kinde of *præjudicia judicii*, and assurances that God hath appointed one great Day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness. Thus the relation of his going forth to his strange work indeed, upon Hierusalem, attended with the visible apparitions of Angels in armed troops in the ayr may be concluded probable; that so there may be some slender draught of the solemnity of that day, when the thrones of Judgement shall be set, and the Judge (attended with ten thousand times ten thousand ministring unto him) proceed to his last Act of justice upon the unrighteous world.

These considerations incline me to receive this narration and the significancy thereof (especially because not knowing where to fix the accomplishment of our Saviours prediction, Luk. 21. 11. but in

Beginning  
with, Arma  
ferunt inter  
nigras crepi-  
tantia nubes,  
Terribilesque  
tubas, &c.

Mat. 24. 8.

Act. 17. 31.

Dan. 7. 10.

in this and some other prodigies related by Josephus) with the favour of a great probability, but not as an undoubted truth.

1. Because the single credit of Josephus (Eusebius but relating the same things in his words) seems scarce sufficient to venture the faith of such a story upon, both because having much converst among the Gentiles, he seems to smell a little of the Gentile superstition, when he adds, immediately after this relation, It would seem a matter scarce credible, but that there follow'd evils great enough for the solemnity of presages; as also because it will appear upon a compare of the same Stories related in Scripture and Josephus, that he usually tunes his relations to the common humour both of Greek and Latine Historians, making them to sound as much as might be to the glory and honour of his own Nation.

Kατὰ τὸν ἑορτὴν  
Ἐπειδὴν αὐτὸν  
Σέιον τὸν  
τὸν περὶ τὸν  
δυοῖς εἰς τοὺς  
εἴρηται τοὺς  
ἰεπόντας περὶ.  
Ἐπειδὴν τὸν  
λαόν.

A. S. N. N. D.

Expansæ su-  
bitò fores  
delubri, &  
audita major  
humana vox,  
excedere  
Deos, simul  
ingens motus  
excedentium.  
Hist. Jud.  
I. 5.

Propos. 3.

2. Because he hath put in one fly (the story of a Heifer, which coming to the Altar brought forth a Lamb) which makes the whole relation of his other prodigies, smell strongly of an imposture. Tis sufficiently known how much this resembles many other legends related in the Romane stories, where the mention of prodigies occurs. Can any man think God would ever work so ludicrous, so cheap, so insignificant a miracle?

3. Because, whereas he there also relates the story of the Priests their going into the Temple about Pentecost to attend the Sacra Vespertina, and hearing that voyce therein μῆλα βαίνουσεν εἰπεύστε, let us goe hence, seconded with the rushing as of persons going out, the whole matter seems but a fable originally invented by some superstitious heathen (and a little disguis'd) whose usual doctrine was that the Gods when their Temples and Altars were defil'd, or taken, us'd to take pett, and (adytis arisque relictis) to betake themselves to some more hallow'd and magnificent shrines. Sure I am, Tacitus appears to understand this relation to some such sense as this. But I think I need not much concern my self to throw out a relation, which hath had peaceable possession of the common faith for so many ages; for (to say no more) 'tis in many regards, an example extraordinary, and 'tis a good maxime, *examples extraordinary neither break a rule, nor make one.*

Upon which account alone, I have no great fear that the other instance wil much prejudice our cause though I allow both a truth and a significancy to that apparition: though perhaps I should not have judg'd so much in favour thereof had I not been brib'd by the authority which the suffrages of so many wise men, and the antiquity of the Authour seem to drive upon that Apocryphal writing wherein it is found.

Thirdly, There appears not now any ground at all to receive any such apparitions in the ayr as the certain signs and monitours of any calamities to ensue upon a Nation, and that,

First, Because we have no warrant from the Book of God, so to regard them, having no precept at all to oblige us, nor yet any example therein to encourage us. The signs of future events which we sometimes find God making use of, were such as (out of their institution) were no way apt to foreshew any any such event; they were most commonly signa

ad

*ad placitum*, such as carried no similitudes of the things whereof they were signs (as the apparitions of armies in the air seem to do of some succeeding battel) that so none might be encouraged afterward to regard them as *Omens*; when again occurring; and fancy that they ministred at all to the vanity of any such observations. Now a negative argument from Scripture, seems conclusive enough, in a matter wherein the faith of a Divine prescience and providence, and mans dutifull observance of God in the way of his judgements, appear so much concerned and assisted, as we are told they are in the religious observation of such things as these.

Secondly, Such kinde of signs would lay men naked and exposed to perpetual delusions and impostures: for how often do the antick shapes of the clouds, serve the imaginations of dragons, and armies in the air? That word זָהָב Zech. 10.1. which we render clouds, the LXX (by a verbal mistake of the radix) translate *պարտութեան*, apparitiones: and a melancholy fancy is as subject (to this real mistake) the translating of clouds into apparitions of Churches or castles, or armies. Can any serious Person then believe that God would have us apply our selves to such a *Proteus* as a cloud is, for a solution of any doubt *de futuro*, which can shift into any shapes and forms of things? Hath he not all along appear'd to value our understandings at a higher rate, then to require them to a regard of things so exposed to suspicion and the conceit of some imposture?

Thirdly, Such kinde of apparitions in the air, have been known not succeeded by any black and tragical Event. The truth is, Wisdom (which useth to draw her lines by the steady and even rule of some well assumed principles) hath not appear'd so critical an observer of such accidents and their Events, as folly hath been; and therefore we are not so well provided of examples to reprehend this vanity, as Sandys his otherwise we might be. I must therefore satisfie my self with a *Transl. Ovid.* single instance which occurs in a learned and sober Writer, who *Met. p. 291.* delivers it as a matter reported to him by Persons of good credit, how that in the year before he recorded that relation, there were *Anno 1629.* seen two opposite Battalions in the air, lancing out their spears, and discharging (as it were) their muskets, victory now reeling; and in the end one side giving chase to the other. Whereas all these things proved but *è vitro fulgura*, being followed onely with jubilees and the voice of joy and peace in our dwellings for many years. Nor can they be (with any colour of reason) presumed to foreshew our succeeding civil wars, being removed by the distance of so many years. Now, one negative instance in such cases, is of more force to unfix and discredit a pretending rule, then two affirmatives to establish it; because the latter (the world being so full of evils) may fall out by a kinde of chance, or the agency of seducing Spirits, whereas the former seem to proclaim some necessity of the Event in nature, and the no purpose at all of God to give notice of any of his counsels by any such emergencies as these.

Fourthly, I doubt not but many of these aery apparitions might be solved by a natural cause. To let pass the conceit of real armies somewhere

fighting on earth , reflected in the clouds as in a glass , ( as at best, but an ingenuous vanity ) the supposed firing of Ordinance and muskets, is I believe generally nothing but the coruscation of some incensed exhalations breaking forth by pauses and intervals from the clouds, and ( as thunder doth ) with the noises and terrors of those military engines : The running to and fro of horse-men and companies may be represented to an active fancy, by the clouds carried by the unconstant force of the winds to very giddy and unequal figures and motions. The stands of pikes and spears may be but the ragged and deformed protuberances of the disturbed clouds. Only I am apt to believe that Nature draws the images of these things in such rude and imperfect figures , that men are forced much to assist and quicken the dulness and defectiveness of the type by the fictions of imagination.

Fifthly , Some of these airy apparitions and noises are managed with that method and artifice, come forth in such chosen seasons ( if we credit relations ) that I doubt not to intitle them to the power and operation of the Aery Principality. Impure Spirits (like juglers) may oft do strange tricks, to call upon themselves the regards of the world, and when they see causes big with their effects , may by such signs foreshew them , to derive upon themselves , either the Opinion of prescience, or of some great affection to men, whom they awaken, though indeed it be, but as *Delilah did Samson*, when ( the Philistines) some great evils are just upon them ; or else (as *S. Austin speaks*) *noxiæ curiositatis retibus implicare*, to fly-blow the minds of men with curious and impertinent enquiries into times to come.

Sure I am , we finde the Appearances of armies and the noise of arms and trumpets in the air , found among such bad company ( so many hatefull Omens and Prodigies observed by the Heathen) as is sufficient to blemish them , and to give suspicion that the observation and production of both , was owing to the same Father of lies. *Ovid* having mentioned the noise of armies and trumpets heard in the clouds, relates (as presages of equal place and repute) the weeping of Statues, the wandring of Ghosts , the odd figures and colour of the Sacrifice , and the like doth *Virgil* in that place so often cited.

The Devil well knew that without the maintaining of some Opinion of his foresight in the minds of men, the fires on his altars would quickly go out , and therefore he appointed all the changes in the *Extæ*, in the face of heaven, in the births of creatures, in the flying of birds, &c. as a kinde of signs from the Gods of some great and strange effects ; which when he saw their causes to swell out withall, and just ready to be delivered of them, he could easily bring about , ( all these little changes , falling within the compass of his power ) that on which side soever the die of affairs fell , were the success of an undertaking on this side or that , he might still secure the repute of his prescience, by holding his easie Votaries in hand, that the preceding Prodigies were a warning of the things which fell out : and therefore he served the ends of imposture much better

*Ubi supr.*

ter upon these dumb and doubtfull, then his speaking Oracles; wherein he hazarded his credit greatly by returning doubtfull or false solutions to the questions proposed to him *de futuro*: well therefore may the Devil be presumed (upon an easie foresight of some great disaster) to cause the entrails of the Sacrifice to put on a sad and unusual face: (and therefore the Poet upon such an accident, spake more truth then he was aware,

---- *cæstique in viscera Tauri*

*Infernī venēre Dei.* ---- ) So also upon his sight of an approaching battel, he may easily give forth a prophetick emblem thereof, in some such martial images and impressions upon the aery Region, his proper province.

If all this satisfie not, I shall readily deliver the Reader to the freedom of his own judgement in reference to such things. For my self, when I finde in the Book of God, that holy and heavenly *Host*, not called forth but to wait upon some great and important Services (the protection of a Patriarch, or a great Prophet, the declaration of the Birth of the Son of God, or perhaps to attend Gods great act of justice upon *Jerusalem*) I know not to entertain any such cheap and little thoughts of them as once to imagine that the Angels are ever sent forth to run a tilt in the air to finde the vain world talk, and to tell it news, or that God would ever confer the honour of so solemn and great a presage upon a paultrey battel at sea or land, which is generally intended but to serve the lusts and passions of men which have broken all those cords of love, precepts of charity, whereby they were bound one unto another.

Fourthly, *The Apparitions of evil Angels, in what places, forms, companies, and their premonitions by what voices, and signs soever, ought not to be attended unto as the prognosticks of any Events whatsoever.* Many

Propos. 4.

relations there are current in writers and common converse of such apparitions in very terrible forms, and that before some great plagues and wars: and I shall not once attempt to build my cause upon the son. Serm. ruines of the credit of them all. (we finde in Scripture, the fall of Luk. 13.5. Saul and Jonathan foretold by the apparition of an evil Angel) pag 18. Such apparitions have happened (though generally in times and places of greatest ignorance and superstition) and that perhaps (as Myst. Godl. was said) that these lying Spirits may maintain an Opinion of their V. Dr. Jack- foresight of things (though the matters signified by them be such as may easily be discovered in their natural or moral causes) or to derive a suspicion upon the stories of Angelical apparitions in sacred Writ, or to get such a stock of credit, whereby they may set up cheaters with the less suspicion for the future: or perhaps in a kinde of petty triumph over those men whose sins together with their temptations, have betrayed them to such fearfull judgements; or perhaps (evil Angels being often the Executioners of his judgements) God will have these *Apollyons* seen (as it were) upon the stage before execu- Psal. 78.44. tion, that men may know and consider into whose hands, in all like-lihood, their iniquities have betrayed them.

But admit the depths of God or the Devil in such apparitions past

our fathoming; sure I am we have no warrant at all to give any evil Spirit the honour of the least trust and regard, by an observance of any word, action or signe of his. God would disown one of his Royal titles, when once black'd and profaned by the Devils usurpation, Hos 2. 16, 17. our Saviour refused a just and true testimony to his Divinity, when given in by the Father of lies, Mark 1. 24. Gods servants refuse his good creatures when once set upon the Devils table, 1 Cor. 10. 21. We are allowed no *fellowship with devils*, by whom truth is never told but to serve some delusion and imposture. And therefore though we read, Psal. 78. 49. that God sometimes made use of evil Angels as the *Executioners* of his judgements, yet never that he commissionated any of them to be the *Denouncers* of them.

To receive therefore the apparitions, voices, drummings, or antick noises of Spirits in any place whatsoever, as presages of some approaching evils (as if like some strange creatures in the sea, they used to shew themselves, and play in sight against a storm) is to consult shame to our selves and our Religion; *To our selves*] because rendering our selves thereby to the suspicion of having a great credulity and curiosity, (pregnant arguments of a soft, vain, and unfurnished minde) *To our Religion*] deriving upon it an appearance of falsehood in those many assurances it offers us of the treacheries and impostures of those forsaken Spirits. Such apparitions report nothing to us with truth and faithfulness, but (what they tempt men least to believe) the Being of a God; and so (as the Vipers flesh cures its own biting) enable us to quote the Devil against Satan, and to cast him out by himself. It is therefore our wisdom not to invite the Devil so far to be our Oracle as to vouchsafe the least credit or regard to any of his prophetick speeches, postures, actions; but to resolve to take the goodness and providence of God as security sufficient for the peace and composure of our minds, and not to put our selves out of his keeping (and so make way for the accomplishment of any of them) by any distrustfull fears, arising from any signs whatsoever given forth by so sworn an enemy to God, truth, and the peace of man.

Propof. 5.

See the story  
more fully re-  
lated by  
Dr. Jackson,  
ubi supra,  
from the Hi-  
storian.

Fifthly, *The appearances of good Angels are now rarely given, hardly discovered, never to be expected; I say, Rarely given*] I do not say, never, lest I speak without book. To omit some very probable relations of this nature, that Apparition is usually thought a Herald from heaven which advised James the fourth of Scotland (in whose counsels at that time the concerns of a Nation were wrapt up) to forbear some vicious practices, but especially the fighting of his intended battel with the English; in those words, *Rex, Ego ad te missus sum, ut te admoneam, nè quò instituisti progrediari; quam admo- nitionem si neglexeris, non erit è re tua, nec eorum qui te comitabuntur.* Which counsel he neglecting, himself, most of his Nobles, and army fell in that fatal battel. *Hardly discovered*] For how easily may the Devil impose upon our simplicity in the livery of an Angel of light? Though I think this negative signe of such an apparition, faithfull

faithfull enough, viz. That these Sons of God never debase themselves to such antick shapes, ludicrous postures and actions, monstrous forms, weak rites which evil spirits (designing to get to themselves the homage of a great fear from some men; or to abuse their imaginations, or to dishonour the image and figure of man (whom they so much hate) or to appear rather ridiculous then abominable) usually doe. *Never to be expected]* because never promised: besides converse with Angels is a blessing which our state of infirmity could not bear, and our follies cannot well admit.

And this I suppose may suffice to tender concerning these second kind of *Prodigies signal*; Stil'd so (*ex communi fide*) because vulgar faith hath prefer'd them to the repute of divine signs and intimations; which I thought fit again to intimate, to excuse the *indecorum* of my applying of the term without the reason thereof, so frequently unto them.

## C H A P. I V.

*Concerning Prodigies (in appearance) Supernatural.*

*Some Prodigies instanc'd in, which seem Supernatural, the truth in reference to them deliver'd in 4 Propositions.* Lying Oracles and Miracles of especial use to advance the Devils kingdome. Strange events not to be easily judg'd miraculous, and why. The first fiery eruption of Vesuvius, probably concluded a signe of judgement, and the reasons of that assertion. What to be thought of that fiery sword which hung over Hierusalem. No prodigies (in appearance) Supernatural, to be received now as signs; and why?

There are some events (which the history of times presents us with) of so peculiar and strange a make and character, that they stand alone in Nature, and their causes stand so much in the dark, that they seem to enter a very fair and plausible plea for the repute of a miracle. Such as are the turning of Ponds and lakes (in appearance) into bloud: swords as of fire seen to hang over cities for several days together; the removal of mountains, or other parts of the Earth, for several furlongs, from their natural places, some strange alterations observed in the motions and tempers of the birds and beasts, or figures and colours of any of the heavenly bodies. With these I reckon some suddain intercisions of the light of the sun, occasioned, not by the veil of an eclipse cast before it, but some unaccountable passion of the luminous body it self. Such a *deliquium* we read of immediately subsequent to the death of Cæsar, concluded by the Ethnick Poet, a kinde of prodigious shrinking of the eye of heaven from the view of so black a wickednes as the assassination of so excellent a person, who upon occasion thereof, thus expresseth himself,

Vir. Georg.  
l. 1.

*Ille etiam extincto miseratus Cæsare Romam  
Cum caput obscura nitidum ferrugine tinxit,  
Impiaque æternam timuerunt sæcula noctem.*

Not. in Job. An example parallel whereunto, is related by *Lavater*, who reports  
c. 9. v. 7. that in the year 1585. Mar. 12. such a darkness suddainly cover'd the  
earth, that the birds went to roost at noon, and the guilty fears of  
men antedated the day of judgment. A like instance whereunto (in  
another kinde) is the suddain *torpor* and standing still of great cur-  
rents, and the parting of their waters in so wonderfull a manner, that  
they seem to carry some figures and imitations of those miraculous  
divisions of waters recorded in sacred Writ.

Such was that (mention'd in our Chronicles) which hapned Anno.  
1399 when the river of *Ouse* in *Bedfordshire*, parted asunder near *Har-  
rold* in that County, the waters from the fountain standing still, and  
those towards the Sea giving way, so that it was passable over on foot  
for 3 miles together. To which I add that unparallel eruption of  
fire from the mountain *Vesuvius*, first hapning in the second year of  
*Titus*; of which it may be truly said, that if all the characters of hor-  
ror, enumerated by Historians, were duly weighed, it would be  
hard to finde its pattern but in Scripture, where we read of a Moun-  
tain which quaked greatly, and that burnt with fire to the midst of heaven,  
Exod. 19.18. Deut. 4.11. with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness.

Now, though I am far from giving to all these effects the repute of  
a miracle (as may appear by my marshalling of some of them under  
other heads) much less of a signe; yet because Nature seems  
not in these as in other Prodigies, to err by any known law, and some  
of them at least, are so wonderfull, that (to speak truth) they stand  
*in confinio miraculi*, I thought good to discourse them apart, and as  
inclos'd under another name and notion. And the rather, because  
if our Adversaries should chance to call a knub a horn, to stile these,  
(or some other of the foremention'd prodigies) supernatural and  
miraculous, they might seem (like *Proteus*) to avoyd all the knots  
they cannot unloose, (reasons they cannot answer) by shifting forms,  
and that event which they cannot advance a signe of the time *sub  
 nomine prodigi*, they may possibly assay to doe, *sub specie miraculi*.

All therefore that I shall offer concerning Prodigies Supernatural  
(whether in truth or pretence, I shall not much enquire) shall be  
coucht in these few ensuing propositions;

Propos. 1.

First, It is a great example of rashness, easily to intitle any strange effect  
(whose cause stands not in a good light) supernatural and miraculous,  
and that upon a four-fold account;

1. We understand not the just extent and compass of that sphear of acti-  
vity assigned to bare natural powers, nor how far they may (in some cir-  
cumstances) exceed the lines of common and ordinary operation. How  
many works of Art are there, scarce the wonder of our days, the per-  
formance whereof, in the rudeness of former times, would have  
prefer'd a man to the repute of *Simon Magus*, the great power of God?  
who would not (two or three hundred years agoe) have voucht the  
breaking down of mighty walls by the force and powers of a little  
black

black dust, as great an impossibility, as the Indians did the communicating by letters at so great a distance? we understand not fully how far our notions of possible and impossible (when we are amongst Agents natural) are fixt and faithfull. As for the miracles wrought by our Saviour, least any shadow of natural power might seem to assist and so to disparage them, he usually exerted his Divinity in *raying of the dead, restoring of a man born blinde to sight, in curing the woman whom Art had given for desperate,* Luk. 8. 43. *in commanding the wave and storms into rest and silence with a word;* and such like works which evidently appear'd to lie *extra vias naturæ,* such whereof no magician ever attempted the counterfeit: otherwise his miracles had left open a wide door for infidelity to break out at.

2. We understand not fully how far the power and dominion of the Prince of the powers of the Ayr extends, and how far he is able to ape a Miracle, by those wonderfull impressions, he can make upon natural bodies. We read of his doing great wonders, causing fire to come down from heaven, Rev. 13. 13. The two ways whereby God hath advanc'd his kingdom, are *Oracles and Miracles;* and we shall finde Lucifer his ambition of being *Similis Altissimo,* exprest in his (though) λόγια καὶ τρέψαται, lying Oracles and miracles. For we read of the deliverers of false prophecies, and the doers of false miracles foretold as immediately subsequent to our B. Saviours ascension, Mat. 24. 24. and some expound those two horns [λόγια καὶ τρέψαται] like to the Lamb, which the Rev. 13. 11. Dragon is said to have, of those two powers of giving forth (though tinsell) Prophecies and Miracles, whereby the Devil in his emissaries did heretofore ape and resemble the Lamb and his followers. And so fair a stamp and appearance had he set upon them, that the World was deceived with them. Nay Hierocles (which yet had the Vers. 14. touchstone of Philosophy to discover them by) was so far abus'd and cheated by those *lying wonders* wrought by that Arch Magician Apollonius, that (as appears from what Eusebius wrote against him) he durst vie them with those mighty miracles, wrought by our B. Saviour himself. To assert therefore the foremention'd, or the like extraordinary works, to be transcendent to the powers and abilities of the infernal kingdome, or that evil spirits can serve no ends of imposture in any of them, is an assertion which seems to me to have more of heat then light therein.

3. We finde all along that God reserv'd his miracles onely to attend some great and excellent ends and occasions: so great that the person and service of John the Baptist, seem'd not great enough to receive the honour of a Miracle. We read of but three Ages of Miracles, 1. When the law was to be given and the Jewish Oeconomy to be settled, and that amongst a people too dull and heavy to be wrought upon by arguments and discourses; 2. When the law was to be restor'd to its just reverence and regard, amongst that Apostate people (the ten Tribes) who were fallen into so lethargick a sleep, that there was no awaking of them into a sense of God and duty, but by the loud voyce of some mighty signs and wonders; 3. When that Oeconomy which was founded in signs and wonders was now to expire, and

and to give place to the kingdom of the *Messiah*. It would speak us therefore greatly ignorant of the sacredness of a miracle, to give the honour thereof to every strange relation, of which our philosophy can give no very smooth and consistent an account. The laws of Nature proceed upon a more excellent counsel and wisdom, then that we may presume them rescinded upon any little or unknown occasions.

4. God's miracles came forth heretofore attended generally with instruction; being wrought by those men of God, who were able to point to their intended ends, and declare the meaning of God in them. Miracles are Gods seal, and therefore some writing and evidence they must be affixt unto, for as the writing without the seal wants authority, so the seal without the writing, certainty and significancy. Gods miraculous works have been generally level'd to some humane benefit (either the confirmation of men in some important truth, or the curing of some desperate disease, or the supplying of them in some urgent strait, or the affrighting of them from some destructive practise) never solely to the advancement of his own power and greatness (sufficiently reported, as the Apostle tells us, by the things which are made) and therefore tis but necessary that we understand what errand this or that supposed miracle comes forth upon, and upon what account we are concern'd therein. Where men understand not the meaning of Gods voice, he speaks but into the ayr. Now what prophet have we able to lead us to the true meaning of any such great wonder? if it be Gods Embassador, where is the Interpreter that can expound its language?

1 Cor. 14. 9.

Upon a consideration of the premises, I understand not how any hasty conclusions now, concerning the miraculousness of any strange event, can reconcile themselves to counsel and sobriety.

Propos. 2.

Comment.  
on the  
Creed. 1. 1.  
c. 24. & Ap-  
pend.

Secondly, Two of the foremention'd occurrences may probably be admitted the intended signs of an approaching judgement, viz. First, That dreadfull eruption of fire from mount *Vesuvius* in *Campania* (first happening in the second year of *Titus*, after the destruction of *Hierusalem* by the Romane souldiers under his command) which was attended with such tragedies, that the reverend D. Jackson doth more then incline to believe that the foremention'd places in *Joel* and *S. Luke*, had (at least) their first accomplishment in that prodigious event. A conjecture which will bid fair for a probability, if we take but a little pains to compare Gods Text, and the Historians comment both together;

*Joel* 2. 30.

I will shew won-  
ders in the heavens,  
and in the earth.

Ita verò res acta; Viri multi & magni omnem naturam humanam excedentes, quales exprimuntur *Gygentes*, partim in ipso monte, partim in agro circumjacente, ac in Oppidis interdiu noctuque terram obire, ac aera permeare visebantur. Posthac consecuta est maxima siccitas, ac repente ita graves terræmotus facti, &c. Dio. Hist. l. 66.

Bloud and fire

And pillars of smoke.

The Sun shall be turned into darkness, and the Moon into bloud.

And there shall be signs in the Sun and in the Moon, upon earth distress of nations, Luk. 21. 25.

The sea and the waves roaring.

Mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after the things which are coming on the earth.

The sitting of the comment of these Historians so closely and handsomly about the Text, offers an easy Apology, for our embracing this literal sense thereof, at least, till another shall be tendered with fairer probabilities. Especially considering the season to which our B. Saviour affixeth the fulfilling of this prediction seems to add some strength and confidence thereunto; now that was the time immediately succeeding to that wherein the black cloud of vengeance ( charactered by the peculiar conditions and signs thereof, in the verses precedent ) was to fall upon the Jewish Church and polity; as may appear from those words of his recorded by S. Matthew, Chap. 24. 29. *Immediately after the tribulation of those days, shall the sun be darkned, &c. i. e. those days ( spoken of before ) wherein God had taken away the hedge about his formerly pleasant garden, the Jewish Church, and delivered it to the rage and malice of brutish men.*

So that as the many false Christs arising, the earthquakes in divers places, the general hatred of men, the fearfull signs from heaven forementioned, seem given as the black tokens foreshewing fa-

*Audires ululatus fœminarum, infantum quiritatus, clamores virorum, alii parentes, alii liberos, alii conjuges requirebant. Plin. de eodem Vesuv. Epist. I. 6. ep. 20.*

*Nubes ex ardente Vesuvio oriebatur, cujus similitudinem & formam non alia magis arbor quam pinus expresserat [ A tree much imitating a pillar in its shape and figure.] Idem I. 6. Ep. 16.*

*Jam dies alibi, illuc nox omnibus noctibus nigrior densiorque, quam tamen faces multæ, variâq; lumina solvebant. ep. 16. Mox dies verus, Sol etiam effulgit, luridus tamen, qualis esse cum deficit, sollet. Nox, non qualis illunis & nebula, sed qualis in locis clausis, lumine extincto, &c. ep. 20.*

*Tantus fuit cinis ut inde pervenerit in Africam, Syriam & Ægyptum, introieritque Romam, ejusque aerem compleverit, & Solem obscuraverit: nec mediocris etiam Romæ trepidatio complures ad dies accedit, &c. putare cœperunt omnia sursum deorsum ferri, Solémque in terram cadere, ac terram in cœlum ascendere. Dion. lib. 66.*

*Mare in se resorberi & tremore terræ, quasi repellere videbatur. Plin. ep. 20.*

*Erant qui metu mortis, mortem precarentur; multi ad Deos manus tollere, plures nusquam Deos ullos, æternamque illam & novissimam noctem mundo interpretabantur: nec desuere qui fictis mentitisque terroribus vera pericula augerent. Idem ep. 20.*

*ta Ecclesiae Judaicæ*, so this dreadfull occurrent (*Miraculum*, as *Pliny* calls it) seems given as a signe that was to forerun *fata Imperii Romani* (the other deadly enemy of Christianity) which from that time began to sink under its own weight, and to labour under great and grievous evils; and not to be accounted among the signs of the mities approaching upon the J<sup>e</sup>ewish State, (as some learned Expositours contend) our Saviour having brought his discourse concerning that to an issue just before. And indeed, no signe seemed more proper then a burning mountain to give the Gentile world to understand that God would shew himself as severe a Judge upon the despisers of his Gospel, as he had before upon the despisers of his law, against whom at the promulgation thereof he proclaimed the *terrors of the Lord in blackness and darkness, and that mountain which burnt with fire unto the midt of heaven.*

Deut. 4. 11.

Harm. in  
Luc. 21. 25.  
Vid. Tract. cui  
tit. Vesuvius  
ardens.

Luk. 21. 11.

Notwithstanding what hath been said, I shall not receive this signe, and sense of these Texts, with more then the favour of a probability, both because I finde Expositours hovering but in the loose air of some general expressions upon them, and fearfull to settle down upon an assignation of the particular time and manner of their accomplishment; (amongst whom, commendable especially the modesty of *Calvin*, who upon that Text in S. Luke, thus delivers his sente; *Quomodo Sol obscurandus est, hodie conjicere non possumus, sed eventus ipse ostenderet.*) And besides the fiery forces in that mountain, have in all likelihood sallied forth since upon men in as dreadfull and destructive a manner, as upon their first eruption.

But lest I be thought to make too curious and unnecessary approaches to this mount of terror; I shall set bounds to any further discourse about it, when I have added; that if upon the Readers further thoughts concerning it, it shall appear more then probably a signe of the time, it will also appear so appointed by God in those Scriptures forementioned; if less, nothing is lost but the courtesie conferred upon the conjecture; and so the credit of our present cause appears not at all prejudiced, which way soever the beam of his understanding (upon a due weighing of particulars), shall incline.

A second instance (in this order of Prodigies) which seems to enter a very probable plea for its reception, as an intended signe of an ensuing vengeance, is that flaming sword (as it seem'd) hanging over the City of *Jerusalem* for the space of a year together, before the Romane Eagles prey'd upon it. Our Saviour prophesied of some fearfull sights, and great signs from heaven, as the forerunners of the desolation of that City; and perhaps upon a due judgement of the several circumstance's of this heavenly phænomenon, it will appear great enough to fill out (in a good measure) that expression of our Saviours; For as that Star which was *cæli index* to the place of our Saviours birth, so this wonderfull appearance, declared by its peculiar and unusual accidents, that it was of no common make, nor came forth upon any mean and vulgar errand. It appears by the story, to have descended so low in the air that it was evidently vertical

tical to the City, which had it been a true Comet it could not have done: and it lasted so long and maintained so fixt a position, that it cannot well be numbered among those *Idola Cometarum* in the Elementary region mentioned before, whose subtle and fluid matter serves them not to any such long continuance, at least not to so settled a posture of appearance.

And most fit it was that a Nation, long deaf to the voice of the many great signs from heaven to proclaim an approaching salvation, should receive some from thence of an approaching destruction. Amongit which none seem'd so proper as such a flaming sword, being a very expressive emblem of war and vengeance, and a kinde of imitation and remembrance of that flaming sword, which drove the first parents of that disobedient people (which rejected the Tree of life, a type of the Lord of life and glory) from the Paradise of God.

They which endeavour to sink the price and value of this prodigious appearance in the air, beneath the esteem I receive it with, by laying beside it some other parallel examples thereof occurring in the Writers concerning Meteors, shall finde me no difficult Auditor of them; if they first fix the accomplishment of our Saviours Prophesie in some instance which may be more plausibly pretended a fearfull sight and great signe from heaven:

Thirdly, None of the forementioned Prodigies, when ever occurring, Propos. 3. are [now] to be received as the signs of any Future events. An assertion which I thus build up.

I. We have no sufficient grounds and reasons to perswade our reception of them as such. There are I know some men which can hang their most weighty principles (like the earth) upon nothing. Reasons and demonstrations are looked upon by them (where Religion appears concerned) as a kinde of cold and dull things, proper onely for Atheists or hereticks to measure their conceptions by: Objects hot and vehement, and that do not much task and employ their faculties, [as Pretended Oracles, Revelations, strong and inexplicable impressions upon their spirits, mighty Prodigies, some turgent imaginations, and traditional persuasions] they use, (as silly birds in the night, to that which glares most) to fly about and admire. The discourses and practices of many men, speak them proselytes to that maxim of the old Heathens, viz. In doctrines concerning the Gods, or any matters Divine, we must never expect science and demonstration; but receive them how strange soever, with the religion of a very passive soul, and submissive faith.

But if we once put Right Reason (which is *Janitor Animæ*) thus by its office and place, our inward house will soon lie open and free for any vile and vagrant Opinion to take up and dwell therein. It is indeed the great maxim of those Sons of mystery, the Cabalists and some Chymists, that *Intellectus perficitur patiendo*, the minde of man (like matter) is rendred most capable of being well informed by becoming *pura potentia*, a passive power; and that truth offers herself solely to such passionate and humble suiters, which can be content even to forgo themselves to gain her. But sure I am God hath

Rev. 22. 2.

Job 26.7.

'Οὐκέτι ἐπὶ

Θεῶν καὶ

τοῖς Δεῖσισι

δημάτων ε-

χων τὰ μαδη-

ματα καὶ ταῖς

επιγνωμόνις

ἔποδειξεν.

Jambl. Pro-

trept. in

Symb. 25.

nowhere required us to a faith which cannot satisfie the reason of a man which searcheth into the grounds and evidence thereof; He hath commanded us to prove, before we hold fast, to chew before we swallow, to sound as well as sail. And therefore till we see some better reason offered to acquit our owning of them as the signs of Gods counsels, besides the imaginations and dictats of dogmatical men (which will venture to break open Gods Cabinet, while they want any sure key to unlock it) it is but a just respect to our selves, to maintain our freedom of dissent, and to believe such strange works levelled to some other white, then what they imagine.

As for the seeming Reasons which this Opinion leans unto, they will appear (like the staff of Egypt) either to break under, or by an easy retortion, to pierce and wound it. For whereas it is urged, that except we admit this end of these semi-miracles, the most quick-sentent will be at a fault, wholly at a loss what end of them to assigne and pitch upon. I answer, Is it so great an inconvenience to admit of some passages in the book of the creature, of which we are not scholars good enough to make a right and proper construction? Are there not some works of Providence which God hath made deep and mystical, on set purpose, that man might be humbled by them into

Eccles 8. 17. a sense of his own ignorance and shortness? see Isai. 48. 7. Eccles 7. 14. and is it a strange thing to hear of some works in the compass of Nature, out of our reach, such as we must behold (as children do the Moon) onely with an ignorant wonderment? Yea, but the world will be alway surprised by judgements, if we admit not such Prodigies the signs of them. And hath not God told, even those whose profession it is to look after and expound the pretended signs of times [the monethly Prognosticatours] that desolation shall come upon them suddenly and they shall not know? And is not man expressly said not to know his time, but to be snared in an evil time falling suddenly upon him? Eccles 9. 12. In sum, the great confidence of the Opinion we contend with, seems to lie (for ought I can perceive) but in a series of many Assertours, which (like persons in the dark) shut their eyes, and take care onely to hold fast by those which went before them.

2. These *Heteroclita Naturæ*, things which fall off from the rule and law of common and usual Nature, minister to bigger ends then presages. For

1. They teach us to pay the tribute of admiration to him; who (though by the ministry of second causes) doeth these great wonders. Deliberate wondring (when the soul is not suddenly surprised) being raised up to an height, is, as one faith, part of adoration, and cannot be given to any creature without some sacrilege. Such wondring consists of Reverence and ignorance, which best becometh even the wisest of men in their searches after God his ways. God hath his wonders of justice, such wherein he causeth a strange coincidence of blinde and contingent Agents, οὐεγγένιον to work together for the detection and punishment of some great Criminals, that men may easily see that the wheel brought over them was full of eyes, conducted by some great Intelligence. He hath also his wonders of mercy, such

Isai. 47. 11,  
12, 13.

such wherein he walks, *in ways not cast up*, to accomplish the well-being and preservation of those which honour him by a great faith (such whereof every pious breast is the *Office* wherein they are registered and recorded.) To these, He hath been pleas'd to add his *wonders in Nature*; the commonness of his other works being apt to Soyl them, and to keep men from attending to all that Wisdom and unsearchable Greatness displayed in them.

2. These things shew us all the creatures to be in Gods hand, and easily commanded (like the clay in the hand of the Potter) to what figures and uses, he shall think fit at any time to appoint them unto. According to that of Job. c. 9. 5, 6, 7. *Who removeth the mountains and they know not, which overturneth them in his anger. Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Which commandeth the sun and it riseth not, and sealeth up the stars.*

The other great Arguments against or for the observation, of any such occasions of wonder, as were last mention'd, as *Ominous*, being the same which fill out the foregoing papers, I shall not hear offer the Reader the *tedium* of any repetition.

## C H A P. V.

Remedies advised against the Superstition of  
Prodigies Signal.

Some men greatly propense to judge by measures vehement and extraordinary, and why. The evil of the common superstition of Prodigies further noted. 5 remedies advis'd against it. 1. The discarding of all jealousies of God. These an especiall occasion of this superstition in the minds of the Gentiles. 2. The avoiding of any great fears or hopes in reference to the future. These apt to make men regardfull of Prodigies and Prophecies, with the reason thereof. 3. The study of natural philosophy. The nature of knowledge (in general) to fortifie against the fears of evil, the particular usefulness of natural Philosophy hereunto. 4. A great indifference of minde as to the issues of things in this world. Persons most in love with the world most sollicitous to know its fortune; evident in the Jews and Gentiles. 5. The discarding of that vulgar principle, That God gives us [now] signs of times. That question [whether there be any or no] answered in three conclusions. The vanity of attending to vulgar prophecies reprehended. An answer to Luke 21. 11. brought for proof of them. Why some signs of destruction given to the Jewish nation. Great changes in the world not easily foreseen, and why. Times hidden from men, with the reason thereof, men greatly addicted to regard any pretenders to divination, the evil of proposing of or attending to any signs of times.

**T**here are a company of men in the world, whose melancholy fancies (like the Cyclops in the Poet) are perpetually employ'd

as it were in framing thunder-bolts for heaven to throw down upon that world, themselves are fallen out withall. Never doth the face of heaven appear mantled up in clouds, but their timerous imagination moulds them into such antick figures that they seem a kinde of visible parables and dreadfull images of some approaching vengeance. There is scarce a night passeth them wherein they have not some terrible dreams, which tell them the fortune of no leis then a kingdom: the souls of some persons scarce seem to come out of the same limbus with those of other men, so different the rules and measures by which their opinions and practices are layd out. In matters of a more sacred and religious reference, *Revelation*, strong impressions of spirit, ecstacies, pretty allegories, parallels, *Cabalism's*; in matters civil, some old prophecy, mystick passages in *Daniel*, and the *Apocalyps*, new and impracticable Ideas of government, strange omens and prodigies, (which, like bladders, shew bigger or less, according as an aery fancy swells and blows them up) are the great compass by which they steer their judgements.

1 Chron. 11.  
32.

But with what mean regards, shall scriptures, laws, sober counsels, and a prudential understanding of the times and what is fit to be done, be entertained, if the light of knowledge, in matters sacred or civil, be once thought to shine most clearly into such crackt and crasy brains, as are, not seldom, the most curious attenders to such things as these? the true fears of religion, would be ready to flie away (like the spirits of over-heated liquours) if overacted by such strong and continued jealousies of heaven, as the observation of Prodigies (in the latitude contended for) would certainly subdue the minds of men unto. Besides, no man (that believeth himself) shall ever be able to possess himself in peace while his inward house is haunted by such spirits of fear as a superstitious perswasion of prodigies will be alway raising up within him.

In his disc.  
de Regno.

Περὶ τῶν Ἡερῶν καὶ γῆν.

I shall therefore, in order to a more perfect cure of so common and dangerous a distemper of minde, advise these ensuing remedies. First, *The discarding of all sowre jealousies concerning God*. Synesius hath observ'd that howsoever the nations were distanc'd from each other (like the lines in the circumference) δόξας επεγγίωματο, by very different Opinions and Sentiments in reference to God and religion, in other matters; yet still οὐαδὸν τὸ δέον ὑπερέσση ἀπαιτεῖ, αἰτιατοχεῖ, καὶ συζητοῖ δῆμοι, καὶ ἀνθρώποι, yet all center'd and met in this great doctrine (both wise and unwise) that God was a good, bountifull and benign Being: the greater wonder to me it is that so many Doctrines among the Heathens, and Christians too (which I am not hear to take notice of) should be receiv'd with a non obstante to this native and easy sense of the Divine Goodness and Philanthropy, lodg'd in their minds: That which my present argument leads me to obierve is, how apt the minds of men are to be leaven'd with that sowre conceit (which cannot dwell with a belief of Gods goodness) which Plutarch justly challengeth in *Herodotus*, that τὸ δίον πανεμονεῖ, καὶ μετὰ πάντας, the Deity is of an envious and troublous disposition, that God is onely *ingeniosus in malis*, that his counsels are especially

especially taken up with the contrivances of new plagues and miseries for the hated world (then which did never a more pestilential air breath from the bottomless pit, ceazeing the very vitals of religion, and corrupting the first and earliest notions rising up in the Soul when conceiving of a God) Hence grows this easy conclusion, that all Prodigies are a kinde of *Van-guard* to give notice of the many troops of furies and miseries marching after; so that hated man may not have so much as the iery hope of good times to refresh his weary spirits with, nor be able to deceive his present pains so much as with a dream. Sure I am that the observation and expiation of all manner of Omens and prodigies among the Heathens, was a sowre fruit growing from this evil root especially, perpetual fears, and unworthy jealousies of God.

Whereas, if men did not measure the Nature of God by that froward and envious spirit which commands themselves they might easily understand all the evils sometimes sent down upon the world; to be (in the language of the Moralist) onely τὸν εἰπεῖν τοις ἡμαῖς θεῖαν φῆσθαι, a divine testimony given in against sin; and intended but to discipline the mad world into some sober and wise thoughts: and they would believe the fairer reports which scripture makes of God, which tells us, *He doth not willingly grieve the children of men, that fury dwelis not with him, that judgement is his strange work, &c.* And then would be easily perswaded that prodigies come forth upon some other errand, then to let them understand they must look to be speedily miserable. Did they once believe the Patience and long-suffering of God, they could not think he lets his creatures (as Moses did the tables) fall out of his hand, and break into disorder; as a discovery of his frequent anger and displeasure.

Secondly, *The avoiding of any great fears or hopes in reference to things future.* Lucian well notes that to a man big with any huge fears or hopes, a foreknowledge of events appears greatly necessary and desireable, (because this brings his distracted thoughts to a point) and therefore he is easily perswaded to attend to any prophecy or prodigie that offers him a promise of satisfaction and resolution. Besides where the soul is under the power of some great affection (as it alway is when sollicitous about the issue of things) any odd accident is apt to make a great impression upon it. Fear (like a crackt glas) represents every strange event in monstrous and frightfull figures to the minde, and will create its object where it cannot really finde it. Moreover, when men will usurp upon Gods province, and *curare futura*, he justly makes their sin their punishment, by delivering them to that anxiety which the observation of omens and prodigies tends to bring them in. Tis a great wisdom to attend the busines of the day, and to leave the issue of affairs with infinite wisdom and goodness; and the rather, because if the event shall be prosperous, there will be time enough to enjoy our happiness when it shall be present (we need not deflowr it, by a precocious joy, before we are espous'd unto it) If adverse, what need we chew pills, and feel our evils twice over, once in fear, and again in presence? sufficient

Τῷ τε Σεδάνη  
ἡ τελεί-  
ζούσι προ-  
νωρις ὀντα-  
γαστάτῳ τῇ  
προδευτέρῃ.  
In Jobshuar.

cient to each day is the present evil thereof, it need not borrow from to morrow.

Thirdly, *The study of natural philosophy.* Its the nature of all knowledge to give a kinde of strength and presence of minde to a man, but especially of *Philosophy*: this will secure us, as from the rocks of *Atheism* because leading us into a notice of some First cause, into which all the second doe gradually ascend and finally resolve; so also from the shelves of *superstition*, because acquainting us with the second causes: for fancy is apt to suggest very monstrous and superstitious notions of those things of whose causes and natures we are unsolv'd; all which flie (like the shadows of the twilight) before the approaching beams of knowledge. *Philosophy* leads us (as men doe horses) close up to the things we start at, and gives us a distinct and through view of what frightened us before, and so shames the follies and weakness of our former fears. He that knows what slow conquests a flame makes upon any humid viscous matter, will not easily account every gentle fire continuing for some time in the air, a kinde of flaming sword, miraculously appointed by God to drive the secure world out of its fools paradise. He that knows and considers how possible it is for springs sometimes to fail, (nay how wonderfull it is that they fail no oftner) cannot readily receive any casual breaches in the streams which hold of them, as presages of some civil breaches in a State, consequent thereunto. Besides, *Philosophy* informs us of the methods of nature, in reserving constancy and immutability to the *interiora cæli & terræ*, but banishing the great instances of variation to the superior parts of Earth, and inferiour of Heaven: and accordingly to the earth-quakes, eruptions of strange fires, new fountains, preternatural generations (in all which, the more central and retir'd parts of this vast globe are not at all toucht and concern'd) there correspond in the *exteriora cæli*, mighty thunders, Comets, new stars appearing now and then, alterations in the figures of the Planets, variety of new spots observ'd to rise and set in the body of the sun, some (though rarer) failings of its usual splendour, &c. The orders and causes of Nature thus understood, would quickly chase away all those *Mormos* which fright men in the night of their ignorance.

Fourthly, *A generous indifferency and deadness of minde as to the good or evil things of this world.* The more the heart of a man outgrows the joys and fears of this world, the more will all things therein appear to him, much too little for the solemnity of a prodigy, the more will he think nothing here of value enough to have its fall come with pomp and observation, and the less will he concern himself to know the future condition of such a vanity as this world is. 'Tis only when mens hopes and fortunes are much embarked in this world, that they are impressive to any great fears in reference to its future state. The *Gentiles* of old that could never lift up their heavy and drossy minds above the dull flats of things sensible and worldly, were the greatest Professours of all the arts of Divination by all manner of strange and unusual accidents. And the *Jews* (to whom God had promised

Ea religio  
propaganda  
est, quæ con-  
juncta est cum  
cognitione  
Naturæ. Sic  
superstitionis  
stirpes omnes  
elidenda sunt  
Tul. De Di-  
vin. l. 2.

Vid. Veru-  
lam. Cogit.  
de Nat. rer.  
10.

Tu in tantis  
erroribus es,  
ut existimes  
Deos mortuum  
signa præmit-  
tere, & quid-  
quam tam  
magnum ut  
perire mun-  
dus sciatur?  
Senec. Nat.  
Quæst. l. 1.  
c. 1.

mised a heaven on this side thereof in the liberal enjoyment of this worlds blessings) were very solicitous about the meaning of strange Providences, the signs of the times, the issue of things; and God was pleased by many Oracles, signs and prophecies to accommodate himself to this low and wordly temper of theirs. But since the introduction of a better hope, the tenders of such spiritual promises, we have scarce any intimations and notices given us of things future, unless some very dark prophecies in the Revelation, (which some learned men conceive already accomplisht) God hereby supposing, our eyes now to be fixt so upon the more clearly reveal'd felicities of another world, as not much to look down to the futurities of this.

Fifthly, *The discarding of that rash principle, that God hath appointed some extraordinary signs of succeeding times.*

There are variety of times and seasons, Καιεὶ πειρασμοῦ. Luk. 8.13. Καιεὶ ἀνάτελεως. Act. 3. 19. Καιεὶ ἐποκοπῆς. Luk. 19.44. there is in Divine dispensations a kinde of chequer-work of black and white days taking place by turns: χῖμα τὰ κόσμου, the scene of this world is Eccles 7.14. thus shifted and varied, that both the various attributes of God, and 1 Cor.7.31. the graces of his Spirit in his servants, may appear and act their parts by turns.

Now men are very impressive to this perswasion, that as God (*in Nature*) hath ordained signs of seasons ensuing [for when the trees put forth, we conclude that summer is nigh, and it will be foul weather, Mark 13.28. when we see redness and lowring to sit upon the eye-lids of the morning] so that he hath (*in his Providence*) given us σημεῖα τῆς καμψᾶς, Luke 16.3. signs of the times approaching, some tokens for good or evil, whereby we may know what clothes to put on, whether we must prepare the garments of praise to entertain the joys, or clothe our selves with a great sorrow and humility to prevent or prepare for the evils which a few days may bring forth.

Before they have ram'd this ground, they hastily advance this conclusion, that Prodigies are a very great and proper signe of the times, because every eye may easily foresee an evil in such signs, though the sons of wisdom alone are able to foresee it in the probable causes thereof. But, that this is a very sinking and deceitfull ground to stand upon will appear upon a brief resolution of this Question, [Whether or no, now, under the times of the Gospel, God vouchsafe particular Kingdoms any such extraordinary signs of the times as are contended for?] Particular Kingdoms, I say; for, as for those signs some speak so much of, of the fall of Anti-christ, of the last times, of the binding and loosing of Satan, of the last judgement, &c. they are all of a very catholick concern, and are so loose and general, that (like the heavenly bodies) it is hard to determine their aspects to any particular time and place, and if any such signs do hereafter appear, they will serve rather as Arguments of Gods providence and prescience, then as monitours of that just distance of time they have left those Events behinde them, of which they are (at large) the forerunners: and so are wholly forein to our present enquiry.

Hof. 7. 9.

In order to a more distinct answer to the Question proposed, I must necessarily premise this distinction of the supposed signs of times. There are 1. *signa indicantia tantum*, such signs as have no real and effective influence at all upon the Event succeeding, but serve as a kinde of *Bath Col*, onely as some softer voice from heaven to declare it to persons of more purged and attentive ears. Such as are Prodigies of all sorts, the aspects of heaven, some old prophesies, plausible parallels, (in many instances) between the occurrences of former times and our own, some stated periods of time beyond which bodies politick have not been observed to continue without some gray hairs upon them, (as the Prophet speaks) some great decays, changes and alterations: some mystical prophecies or general promises in Scripture, forced by a strong and active fancy to the narrow sense and interest of some private times and occasions. Many such kinde of signs there are, w<sup>ch</sup> (because I intend not to feed curiosity, but to starve it) I purposely omit. 2. There are other signs spoken of (of better name and credit) which we may style *signa operantia*, such signs as seem to carry their effects in the womb of their own powers and sufficiencies; having an influence upon them either in a moral way [as the fulness of the iniquity of a Land, upon the punishment thereof.] or an active and physical, as the general bias and inclination of a people, the precipitate counsels of men in trust, and many such like which politick discourses, and the history of times may best lead us to the knowledge of.

This premised, I shall return an answer to the question proposed in these three Conclusions;

First, There are no such *signa indicantia tantum* of any changes in States and times, as mention hath been made of. None I say, that God ever appointed, or man may safely trust to. A truth which I shall presume evinc'd, if I can degrade Prodigies, Prophecies, Heavenly aspects from the honour of being Gods signs. Of all which I doubt not to say, that men may call upon their own fancies to divine unto them, and please themselves in the visions of their own heads; but neither Scripture nor solid reason warrant us now to receive any of the instances mentioned, as Gods tokens of some great plague, or mighty changes in a State, suddenly to ensue.

I Cor. 10. 6.

First therefore, I assert Prodigies to be none of Gods designed tokens. The credit of this assertion I shall trust solely with the evidence of the precedent discourse: adding here onely, (because they are pretended the warnings of heaven) that it is not at all likely, that those men which will not be warned by those great examples of divine Justice extant in Sacred Writ, (in which they may see themselves executed in effigie) would ever learn wisdom from Prodigies, and those attested generally, but upon the faith of two or three ignorant spectatours: nor can it reasonably be presumed that those strong holds in the hearts of men, usually impregnable to all the batteries of sermons and afflictions, should ever yeeld upon the summons of any such supposed warning pieces (whose bullets fly so much over them) whose threatened evils stay in loose generals, and point not to any particular persons, or time, or nature and condition of the judge-

judgement. So that as good men need no such warnings, so bad ones do not deserve them, so little use would they in all probability make of them, if they were afforded. More sober therefore, and advised the Doctrine couch'd in those Ethnick fables, in which the Poets feign *Nemesis* (Divine Vengeance) the Daughter of *Oceanus* and *Nox*, the strange vicissitude and revolution of affairs in this world, and the dark and inscrutable counsels of heaven; and the *Parcae* to have had their habitation in a deep cave, whence they oft issued forth suddenly upon the secure and unwary world.

2. *Vulgar Prophecies* are not to be received as any signs of future times. It was the Opinion of some of the *Jews*, and most of the *Gentile Philosophers* of old, that the soul came down into the body, pregnant with a *δυάριος μαντηίη*, *ἡ περγυρωσμή*, a prophetick and prognostick power, which it could here not exert and feel, being now *blinde and defect*. *Orac.* *Vid. Plut. de*

*unable to see afar off*, because of a veil of flesh and a thick mist of fantasms cast before its eye in this embodied state. A Doctrine, which the carriage and demeanour of the soul, while a prisoner to its own house, seems a little to encourage; for as the bush in the fable, having sustained a great loss of cloth, stands ever since by the highway and catcheth hold of every mans clothes, in hopes to repair its own losses; so the souls of men seem to express a tacit sense of a great loss in regard of the knowledge of things future, in that they stand (as were) *in trivis*, and hastily catch at any pretending Prophecy and shadow of Divination: and indeed I have *nothing* (in this matter) more to accuse my own Nation then others of, it being an argument of the blindness of most ages and Nations, that they readily swallow down such flies as these, when tended to them.

This branch of superstition not dropping much upon our grounds, it may suffice to strike at it but with this one consideration: *Such Prophecies evidently appear no signe of the times, because not coming forth from God who alone is able to declare the end from the beginning:* \* For they are often found (like lines drawn by no rule) to crois and thwart one another; \* they are generally observed to abuse mens minds with vain hopes and pannick fears; \* the style they are generally delivered in wears the Devils livery, being full of darkness and perplexity. \* They engage the minde to attend to hurtfull curiosities, and difficult impertinencies; \* they are not all levelled (what was noted of old of all the Devils predictions) *περὶ τῶν ἀπόφθελμάς, η̄ οἱ οὐρανοὶ* *ορίας η̄ εἰδοὺς καλόποιον τῷ αὐτοποιῶν*, to the bettering and correction of mens lives and manners. \* God is never own'd in them as p. 335. *Origen. l. 7.* *contr. Cels.* the Authour of the evils foretold, nor repentance as the remedy; \* the persons which deliver them are generally very ignorant, vicious, or hypochondriacal; \* they frequently betray men (by some doubtfull expression) to the evils they seem to warn them of, \* they come forth commonly and are most attended to, in times of action and expectation.

The Devil then must be acknowledged the Authour of most of these vulgar Prophecies; and will any man that owns Christ for his Prophet, receive the Devil for his Oracle? or when he is sick of the present

present times, go to the God of Ekron (by attending to any such Prophecies) for quiet and resolution? Shall we value our faith at so cheap a rate, as to trust it with the Oracles of the Father of lies? Can the Devil be presumed able to give us true resolutions to any questions *de Futuro*? (did God ever make him of his counsel, or deliver times and seasons into his power?) or willing (if able) to do it with any fair and single purposes and intentions? Have the beams of the *Sun of Righteousness* put out all the fires on his Altars, the glory and power of the Divine Oracles and miracles, spoiled his great trade of *Oracles and lying wonders*, and shall our easiness and vanity encourage him to drive this more secret and little trade of Prodigies and Prophecies?

3. We are next in the third place, to evince the *various aspects of heaven*, no intended *signs of times*; but because the contrary events of things, do so often *make*, or prove the *Diviners by them, mad*; and because the greatest and most wonderfull change in State, that ever happened (by the restauration of His Majesty in peace and honour) was not so much as dreamed of by all the Privy-Counsellors to the stars; and for that my work hath been lately so happily taken out of my hand, and the subject scarce comes within the suburbs of my present Argument; I shall pass this third particular: though conceiving the interposal thereof necessary, to serve the order and method of the Readers thoughts and meditations in this matter.

As for the Arguments drawn from those fearfull sights and great signs from heaven, mentioned Luke 21. 11. precedent to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish polity; to encourage the expectation of any such signs of times now, or the advancement of Prodigies into the repute of any divine Monitors, they will appear to be greatly inconsequent, if we consider,

1. All those accidents were foretold and particularly appointed by God as signs. Particularly, the opening of the gates of the temple (some time before its desolation) of their own accord, though of such massy brass, that they could not be shut or opened (if we credit Josephus) without the twisted strength of twenty men, and though secured with great bars of iron, is thought by some learned Jewish and Christian Expositours, the accomplishment of the prophecy of Zechariah, chap. 11. vers. 1. Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars: Where by Lebanon, they understand the Temple, built especially of the cedars there growing, as it is elsewhere in the Prophets, used to signify. And Munster upon the place tells us that one of the Jewish Doctours upon occasion thereof, thus rebukes the Temple, Ego cognosco imminere tui desolationem, juxta vaticinium Zechariae, qui dixit, Aperi Libane portas tuas. But what pattern can be shewed from the Book of God, whereby any, much less all, the forementioned Prodigies, hold the place and honour of Divine signs?

Ezek. 17. 3.  
Hab. 2. 17.  
where the  
Chald. Par.  
instead of Le-  
banon reads  
בֵּית  
מִקְדָּשׁ  
the house of  
the sanctuary.  
Isaïx. 18. 10.

2. The miseries foretold by those signs, were great without example. Josephus calls them evils οὐκέτων ἀξια, worthy of some signs. They came not forth as the Heralds of some petty war, or to precede the

the

the funerals of some great Personage, but (as it is called) a great tribulation, such as was not since the world began nor ever shall be;

*Exemplaque carens, & nulli cognitus ævo  
Luctus erat.*

3. The destruction of Ferusalem was a type and picture of the final destruction of the world. And therefore fit it was that the terrors of the latter, should be a little pattern'd and shadowed out in the fearfull sights and Prodigies attending the former; besides, the consternations of soul, and failings of heart which these foregoing signs wrought in some men, before the decree brake forth, made the destruction of Ferusalem (in all the circumstances thereof) the more lively type not onely of the terrors of the last judgement, but of those horrors and sinkings of spirit in bad men which shall go before it.

4. Our Blessed Saviours extraordinary prediction of those Prodigies as his signs to that generation, seems rather to assure them not intended the common fore-runners of any great plagues and wars, and that no good crisis can be ordinarily made of the future condition of a state by a regard to any such in themselves doubtfull and unfaithfull indications. For what need of predictions, if these signs were to fall out by a kind of common rule and law of providence? and how unnecessary had it been to appoint such accidents for signs of evil, which draw after them a series of evils with so great a constancy, that they seem (without a Prophet) to appoint themselves the signs of the times?

5. The condition of those times seem'd especially to require some such signs. For, 1. They serv'd then as mercifull warnings to Christs followers; to hasten their escape from that house (that City) which was ready to fall upon them and involve them in its ruins. 2. The Jews requir'd signs from heaven, and God would not be wanting to any probable means and motives of their repentance. 3. The Jewish œconomy commenc'd in fearfull sights at mount Sinai, and great signs from heaven; and fit it was its conclusion should somewhat resemble the solemnity of its beginning. 4. The many signs given by our Saviour serv'd gradually to wean the hearts of his followers from Hierusalem (once the light of their eyes) of whose determin'd desolation, these gave them such full and repeated assurances.

Secondly, We cannot receive any Signa Operantia, as the faithfull and Conclus. 2. unquestionable intelligencers of the condition of succeeding times; as the unquestionable intelligencers, I say, and that,

1. Because God often acts secondary Agents to secret and unknown ends. He acts sometimes without, but usually beyond them, and hath oftentimes ends to serve upon their motions and counsels, which they reach no more then a beast doth the intention of its Rider.

2. Because God often accomplisheth his biggest ends by means unpro-  
mising and almost invisible. He frequently rows his purposes to har- If. 60. 22.  
bour, while the means seem to look quite another way: what is ob- 1 Cor. 1. 28.  
serv'd of the methods of God in Nature, holds true generally in the methods of his Providence. The greatest works are perform'd by the least

*Omnis actio  
naturalis per  
minima trans-  
igitur, aut  
saitem per .  
illa, quæ sunt  
minora quam  
ut sensum se-  
riant.*

Bac. Org.  
l. 2. Sec. 7.  
Zech. 4. 6.  
Mat. 13. 36.

Ezra. 4. 24.  
Rev. 12. 1. v. 2.

Object.  
Chap. 24.

Sol.

least and most insensible Agents. We shall finde great kingdoms in History, commencing (like a great snow-ball) from a handfull, increasing to a greatness (in the eye of sense) immoveable, and at last concluding in soyl and dirt. But especially observable is this usage of Providence in the management of the affairs of the Church, which (like Christ the head thereof) springs as a root out of a dry ground, and was never any great gainer by the wars and arms of Princes.

3. God sometimes makes use of means great and pompous to some ends weak and little in the eye of sense. To what great actions all on the sudden, did he strengthen the hands of the King of Sweden? his victories drew the eyes of the world upon him, and 'twas concluded by some, that Providence design'd him the *Apocalyptic Angel* which should pour out one of the *Vials* upon the Beast, when behold, unexpectedly the current of his successes runs under ground, and men engag'd to conclude God had ends more secret and spiritual to accomplish by him, then they imagin'd.

4. God usually advanceth his great works and ends, by pauses and periods. Providence (in the advancement of the church) hath usually its *fines abruptos*. God in the works of Nature doth *compendium facere*, goe the nearest way to his ends; but in the works of providence he doth *circulum describere*, goe about, and his work advanceth by such slow and silent progresses; that in the issue, it seems to any but a prudent and severe observer, the issue of time and chance, rather then any steady and well advis'd understanding.

5. God hath an unknown variety of means and methods to accomplish his purposes by. He works by any means, by weak, by contrary, by none. He sometimes brings his greatest ends to birth by the midwifry of seeming casualties, and little emergencies, which taken asunder are weak and common, but viewed in consort speak excellent art and counsel: the observation whereof drew forth that Christian speech of Machiavel in an Ethnick dress, *Fatorum viæ & rationes producendorum effectuum, obscuriores sunt quam ut à nobis intelligi queant.* Upon these and many more accounts (out of the lines of our present Argument) the fairest promises of these active signs, may quickly prove lies to us and abuse our trust. As for that *Moral signe*, so much talkt of [*The fulness of the iniquity of a land*] 'tis to intrude into Gods counsels to determine when it is, the *Ephah* stands by him alone, and he onely knows how near it is to filling.

But possibly, it will here be objected in the words of Job. *Why seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, doe they that know him, not see his days?* i. e. why at least doe not wise and good men (styl'd the persons which *know God*, in scripture) see the times of great mercies or judgements (usually call'd *Gods days*, as was noted before) when as yet at distance, and approaching?

I answer, Even good men (like men in a mist) though they can see their way, yet cannot see far before them for very good reasons. 1. That so the knowledge of the good or evil of the time to come, might not disturb the duty of the time present. 2. The knowledge of

of Gods counsels is the prerogative onely of our Saviour, He is *Palmomi*, the great numberer of secrets. Dan. 8. 13. It is honour great enough for us to be *filiī thalami* to the King of heaven, he onely must be *socius consilii*. 3. God will hereby teach us to walk by the rule of his word, not the issue of things. 4. That so we might honour him with a great faith, following of him, as it were, like *Abraham*, not *knowing whither we goe*. 'Tis a sign we dare venture our selves with our Pilots skill and integrity, when we sleep securely, not knowing particularly what course he steers. 5. That so, not knowing in what time or manner, *our Master will come unto us, we might be always watching*. 6. It is a curious and unnecessary knowledge. God hath so appointed it, that *ad minime necessaria minimum lucis acciperemus*. Scripture acquaints us not with the figures of our Saviours person, nor the usages of his life before his publick ministry, nor the methods of the Divine Decrees, nor the orders of the Angelical hierarchy, and multitudes of questions referring to the future state, and the accomplishment of Prophecies, it remits to the solution of our great *Elias* at his second coming. God is pleased to recommend to us the plainness of his precepts which we must know, by the obscurity of his Providences which we need not; so unnecessary the knowledge of things future, that some of the Ancients conceive, that therefore God gave the People of the Jews their Oracles and Prophets which were to inform them even in matters of a worldly concern [as the success of a battel, recovery from a fit of sickness, the condition of other kingdoms in after times, &c.] because else in all likelihood they would have apostatiz'd from the true God to the rites of the Gentiles [who had their *Oracles, Auguries, Diviners, Soothsayers*] ἀστόνεις ἀντὶ ἀρχαριών τοῖς τύποις γνῶσιν λιχνείας τῷ εἰδουλῷ αὐτοῖς, being prompted thereunto by that natural liquorousness in the minds of men after the knowledge of things wrapt up in futurity. So unnecessary did our Saviour seem to judge this knowledge, that his prophecies (if all put together) would not much exceed the writings of the least of the minor Prophets, though himself the Great Prophet of his Church.

Thirdly, There are some effective signs of Events, upon a view whereof Conclus. 3. a very probable judgement may be sometimes made by a wise person of the issue of affairs. Sometimes indeed second causes, which seem most pregnant with such effects, shall have miscarrying wombs, and all the *occulata malitia* (in the phrase of the Philosopher) the most probable counsels of the great *Oracles* of state, which own no providence nor power Superior to their own, shall be turned into foolishness, to give the world arguments of a Divine providence concern'd in the affairs of men. But yet oft times God permits things (as trees doe) to fall that way to which (in the judgement of prudence) they seem to incline; that so, humane foresight and prudence (the image of Providence) may appear valuable to men, and the wise man and the fool may not be thought to stand upon a level, and all things to run upon a die.

It is a pregnant argument that wisdom was never very friendly to the

Mar. 13. 35.

Orig. Cont.  
Cels. I. 1. p.  
28. & I. 3.  
P. 113.  
Deut. 18.  
14, 15.

Td Sanc*dis-*  
eo*n* p*ariw-*  
des p*ar* & p*-*  
xlii p*on* & li  
e*x* e*or* t*av* y*d*  
e*v* D*e* g*u* & n  
L*ux* n*y* u*c-*  
u*p* i*n* i*p* r*w-*  
f*ns*, &c.  
Plut.de.def.  
Orac.

the world, that it hath been so prone in all times to receive pretended divination and prescience, with more sacred regards then laws and wise men; and yet at the same time have given the glory of the gift thereof to the weakest understandings. Madmen, Persons transported by the heats of a feaver, their prophets when in a fury, Star-gazers, Fortune-tellers, Women, (for such were the Sibylline Oracles deliver'd by) critical observers of omens and prodigies, persons that declaim hotly against (what they understand not) humane learning, and such as (like old men) see and know least of things near and present, have been often thought to see things at some distance and in futurity, most exactly and distinctly.

But we shall finde God in Scripture so far securing the honour of true Divination, as to confer the gift thereof (generally) upon men, and those of a pious and learned education, and all the shadows thereof which may be yet found in the world Solomon tells us dwell in a wise and understanding Soul [Prov. 22. 3. *A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself;* and that not by consulting of Prodigies, but observing the seeds and causes in which it lies hid.] As all other gifts and abilities, once miraculous and extraordinary, those of healing, of speaking with tongues, of interpreting the Scriptures, of discerning of Spirits, to this also of foreseeing events future (so far as they remain yet in the world) are reserv'd solely as the reward and honour of the diligent, observant, and understanding person.

To dismiss this particular: *Times and Seasons* are especially reserv'd in Gods power, and 'tis our wisdom to study rather how we may redeem the present time, then understand the future. As for that threed-bare Argument therefore (*Signs of future times*) I could wish it might be worn no longer in writings and discourses, not onely because things shew of colour, but according to the light men stand in, but because the men whom they are designed to deter from any course of sin, start at them possibly at first, (as birds doe at the images of a man in the fields) but afterward sit down upon them and neglect them, perceiving (in the issue of things) that they are devoyd of [life and motion] truth and certainty: and so these false fears in religion may chance to discredit the true, as the adventitious heat in bodies oft-times supplants and betrays the natural: besides, all such signs of times doe but tender the short and narrow thoughts of man, as the standard of Gods: and tend to detain people always in a gazing and expecting posture, so that they compose not to the work and duty of the day. And to encourage rash and unwarrantable purposes, and therefore perhaps the wisdom of the State may in time see reason to interdict the publication of prodigies and Astrological predictions, under as severe a penalty as it hath old prophecies; all being but the *ignes fatui* leading to the boggs of sedition, by amuzing men with a false light, (the pretended knowledge of the *signs and state of future times.*)

CHAP.

## CHAP. VI.

## Concerning Prodigies Penal.

Having thus (in a method as much required to the rules of Logick, as the uncertain and doubtfull colour and condition of the Subject would allow) discoursed the first part of my Argument, [Prodigies barely signal], that which the order propos'd lays next before us, is the consideration of Prodigies penal. By which I understand [pœnarum monstra] judgements of an unusual make and more dreadfull aspect. Now these are either Personal, befalling some particular members of the common body, who (to use the significant language of Scripture) have not died the common death of all men, Numb. 16. nor been visited after the visitation of all men; or National, when the whole body of a Nation, or the greater part thereof, is smitten with a rod of an unusual size. These also may easily be conceived by men as a kinde of hand out of the clouds to write Tekel upon persons or causes distastfull to themselves, and therefore I shall (as I can) direct to a sober notion concerning them both in these five Conclusions.

## SECT. I.

## Prodigies Penal how to be interpreted.

Two conclusions here laid down to direct to a right notion in reference to judgements extraordinary. These without other proof, no safe signs of the extraordinary sinfulness of Persons. Men apt to think them so and why. Nor yet of causes: proved by several considerations. Eminent judgements upon eminent sinners to be greatly heeded. A judgement signal and remarkable in three cases especially. Two miscarriages to be avoided in the observation of the punishments upon our Neighbour.

Our first Conclusion is this. Judgements Extraordinary, are not Conclus. I. (without further evidence) concluding Arguments of the extraordinary sinfulness of Persons or causes.

First, Not of the extraordinary sinfulness of Persons. Men are generally prone to finde their own vertues in Fortunæ blanditiis (to weigh their own merits at the false beam of outward blessings and successes) and their brothers faults in Parcarum tabulis, the sad destinies and evils which lie upon his lot. Jobs friends judged the dimensions of his iniquity by the shadow of the sufferings which were laid upon him, and concluded the former great because the latter were so. Shimei concluded David to be a man of bloud, because evil was raised up to him out of his own house, 1 Sam. 16. 8. The Disciples that the man or his parents had greatly sinned because he was born blinde, Joh. 9.

Job 2. 13.

2, 3. The Barbarians, that the Apostle was deeply indebted to divine Justice, when his hand was arrested by the viper, Acts 28. 4. The Disciples that those were the greatest sinners in Jerusalem upon whom the towre of Siloam fell, and became both their monument

Vid. Casaub. and executioner, Luke 13. 4. Thus among the Heathens of old, if a person were struck dead by lightning, they presently conceived his crimes as black as his smitten body, and look'd upon him as judged by heaven it self, good for nothing but to make an example of to the rest of men. And the Oratour vainly inferr'd God had no great love for his children of old (the Jewish Nation) because he severely corrected them so often. And many amongst our selves, if

Sat. 2. the fire of God fall and consume their neighbours dwelling, if he fill not up the number of his days, nor be gathered to his grave in peace, are apt to hasten to a rash sentence, and to write in his ashes, [For-saken of God.]

Now such hasty conceits as these, rise up in our minds, partly from a peasanly notion of good and evil in us, we are apt to over-rate our bodies and estates, and then to estimate the favour of God by the references and aspects his Providences bear towards them. Besides we conclude (the great rule of justice being this, that all punishments be adjusted to the merits of the person) that all punishments extraordinary, are the most proper indications of a correspondent guilt.

Eccles 8. 14. Whereas Gods distributions of rewards and punishments in this life, are not directed by any of our short and scanty maxims and notions. He often puts that metall into the hottest fire, which he intends shall bear his own image in most lively figures. He hath privileged his servants from some sin, but from no punishment. Job 1. 12. Iah. may fall in a battel, uzzah be suddenly smitten for an errour of love and zeal, a daughter of Abraham be bound by Satan, a Job delivered to the power of Satan both in body and estate. A person may

Levit. 13. 6. (like the leper under the law) be smitten with a very black and dark plague and yet be pronounced clean before men. Look as in some Prodigies signal, things seem so delivered to the powers and forces of secondary Agents, that the world appears but a kindé of great Engine moved solely by certain weights and springs within it self, and all effects resolvable into bare and single Nature; so in Prodigies penal, Gods arrows seem so to fly by dark, and heavy plagues to fall with so little choice and distinction, that the world seems a great lottery, and time and chance to happen to all events and persons. God (perhaps) intending this cryptick management of affairs, as a kinde of Divine temptation, to prove whether we be such men in understanding as to stand by the doctrine of a Providence, while the necessity, power, and wisdom thereof are rendred so much to dispute by the great appearances of Nature and Fortune, and whether we be quick-sighted enough to discover that the living creatures have the hands of a man, though half hidden under the covert of their wings, that all causes and events are managed by a hand of Wisdom and reason, though they may seem to fly at random, to our first and more unwary thoughts.

Ezek. 1. 8.

Excel-

Excellent therefore the advice of Solomon, who having told us that there is a just man who perisheth in his righteousness; and a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness, thus directs in the following words [Be not righteous over-much, neither make thy self over-wise] i. e. Do not in thy fond thoughts acquit thy self more righteous than the person upon whom thou seest such a judgement fall; neither make thy self over-wise by arrogating an understanding sufficient to expound this riddle of Providence [Gods dealing out such hard measure to such a person]; It is a rashness to say the tree was rotten, because we see it blasted. If it be but *τείγεσμός αὐθόμνης* (in the phrase of the Apostle) such an affliction as some man hath suffered, *1 Cor. 10. 3.* and any may, let us not by any censorious speeches poison our brothers wounds, which call for the oyl of our comforts and prayers. When we read that *Antioch* (where the Disciples were first called Christians) and the Churches of the *Colossians* and *Laodicea*, (to which the Holy Ghost directed particular letters by the hands of S. Paul, and S. John) perished by an earthquake; of Gods forsaking the Levantine Churches, of the seas sudden breaking of its sandy girdle; and overwhelming Cities or Countreys, of the many thousands which perished upon the second terrible eruption of fire from mount *Vesuvius*, or the like judgements great enough for an *Epocha, Anno 1631.* we are not to afflict their miseries, by charging a greater guilt upon their persons and memories than on other men; but rather (with the Apostle) Stand and behold the severity of God upon them which fell, and adore his goodness to us who are not thus surprised in our wickedness, or visited with some strange affliction which might make us infamous as well as miserable, and encourage uncharitable men to *clap Job 27. 23.* their hands at us, and to hiss us out of our places.

Secondly, Neither are any such extraordinary judgements (in destination of any other evidence) to be received as conclusive arguments of the sinfulness of causes (civil or sacred.) Doctrines and causes change colour and appearance in the eye of the multitude, according as heaven shines more or less upon them by successes. Our histories make mention of a very hot contest about the marriage of Priests, whether were more acceptable with God, they which vowed single life, or they which were married. At last the Contenders agreed to *The Late Church Hist.* remit the controversy to the debate of a Synod, where they which asserted the marriage of Priests, placed themselves on one side of the room, and they which appear'd against it, on the other: and so it happened that the side of the house, whereon the defendants of the marriage of Clergy-men sat, fell down, and many of them were hurt, and many lost their lives: Which accident was construed Gods determination in the dispute, and received as a signe that he was better pleased with those which vowed single life; and the arguments of their adversaries were hereby (long after knock'd at head, as well as themselves, *Baronius* (to inferr the piety of that payment) In *Annal.* takes notice that the Church of England was even overspread with circa An. schisms and heresies, *similac donarium Petri solvere desierunt,* as soon 740. as ever the people left off to pay Peter pence. And of late, *si quid humanus*

*manitas acciderit*, any distemper incident to humanity, have befallen persons in attendance on the publick Service, they have been rashly urged as caveats from heaven against the very prayers. And thus (in common life) where men are at variance, and see the rod of God lying upon the back of their adversaries, they are ready to say, God hath espoused their cause and avenged their quarrel; and so, to kill their brother with Gods sword, and make him a party in all their petty quarrels and animosities.

Against all such unclean proofs, which (like the Crab) go backward, from events to rules, I offer these considerations,

1. As God in his word, hath recorded some actions of very eminent persons: [as the equivocating of Abraham with Abimelech, Rachel her defeating of Laban with a falsehood, some actions of Samson, &c.] not noted (like the Jewish Sepulchres) with any visible signe of reproof and dislike, that so men might not unwittingly defile themselves by copying out the example (in which he doth but prove our constancy to his even and undoubted precepts, and try whether we have understanding to put a difference between the bright and darker side of that cloud of witnesses we are to eye in our way to heaven): so also in his providence there are tentationes divinæ; God often blasts the cause of truth and goodness by adverse provi- dences; the cloud often rests upon the tabernacles of the Righteous, the fire of heaven sometimes strikes a religious house, the chief wit- nesses of truth shall be forc'd to know themselves by the title of *Victus Dei populus*. God hereby makes trial whether we will believe the spirit of the living creature to move in the wheels, whilst they de- scribe such involv'd and perplex'd circles and motions; whether we love truth and virtue, or rather their fortunes and felicities. Besides, the divine relation, and light of righteousness and truth, never make such clear reports of themselves, as when they break out and shine forth at last, through all the clouds of persecution and heresies, God often permits them for a time to be obscured withall.

2. Prodigious evils upon its Adversaries, is a plea which almost any cause is able to enter for it self at one time or other. The Israelites fell twice before the Benjamites though engag'd in a war (sel- dom unprosperous) intended onely *ut vindicta publica*. We finde the Heathens often mentioning the judgements which befell the

Vid. Val.

Max. Cap.

de Contempt.

Relig.

Herodot. l. 8.

c. 37.

*contemptores Deorum & religionis*, among them. And Herodotus tells us that several Barbarians (as he styles them) adventuring to rush rudely upon the Temple of Minerva, had the irreligion of the attempt aveng'd upon them by a fire from heaven. An event to which I incline to intitle the especial agency of the Devil (amongst whose stranger works, the causing of fire to come down from heaven, is especially instanc'd in Rey. 13.13.) to maintain thereby a rever- ence in the minds of men to his altars and rites, and perhaps to imi- tate the fire which came forth from God, under the old law, to a- venge the irreverend and unhallowed approaches to his altars; or which fell from heaven to chastise the rude and violent addresses of

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the Captains and their fifties to a *Man of God*. However neither of these two examples (for I must rather croud then leave out instances, they are so many) will encourage any man to acquit the *Benjamites*, or to bless an *Idol*.

3. God hath supply'd us with more even and steady rules to estimate the straightness or crookedness of any cause by, then *Prodigies penal*, which an active fancy may easily tune to the air of any opinion and practice whatsoever. We have the *Oracles of God*, the counsels of wise and good men, the common principles which manage the discourses of the world, the laws of a State, and our own exercised reason, which is (in the language of *Plutarch*) *τῆς ἀληθείας πίπον*, the great Oracle of truth to resolve us in the emergent doubts of life. And it is especially because men are under a quick sense, how exact an eye is requisite to discern how nearly any of these rules touch the building (any cause or doctrine) of whose evenness there may be a doubt; and that this method of knowledge engageth them to *dig for understanding*, and requires them to an industrious use of themselves; in the acquist of true resolutions in a case, and perhaps may detain them some time but in the place of candidates and Probationers for truth, that they are so easily inclin'd to attend to the (supposed) intimations of a *Revelation*, some *strange prodigy*, or *prophecy*, a mighty impulse, which give them the conclusion without tasking them to a tedious consideration of the value of the premises, and lift them up into the *Tree of knowledge*, without any industrious climbing of their own. But certainly God who bade us *buy the truth*, never intended it should be got upon such cheap and easy terms; men may suspect their wares to be nought, if they cost no more then an idle attendance to such fantastical measures as these generally are.

4. Gods particular judgements, as to the special ends and intendments of them, are generally inscrutable. We commonly set so high a price upon our causes, parties, and opinions, that we easily imagine, the biggest end, Gods judgements can be directed to, is the bearing witness to the truth and righteousness of them. By which fancy, we become a kinde of spiritual *Anthropomorphits*, shaping out a God like our selves, and laying out the counsels of heaven by the poor, short, (and often peevish) thoughts and models of a man. If we consult Scripture we shall seldom or never finde a person onely of a corrupt judgement in reference to some Doctrine of religion (if otherwise of a blameless life) smitten with any great plague from heaven, but often, persons of corrupt and depraved manners: because all the laws of righteousness carry *δικαιονέατον*, a demonstration within themselves, and stand in so full a light, that (like the Sun beams) they bear testimony to themselves. Whereas matters of faith and doctrine appear not before the minde in so great an evidence. Men indeed are apt to follow a little difference of Opinion from themselves (in religion especially) with thick *Anathemas*, and quickly to blow it out into a schism or heresy (because such differences seem to dispute the strength of their Arguments),

gements) but are easily inclin'd to look upon even a great miscarriage in life, through the other end of the prospective, and to shrink it to a *nt̄pua*, a bare humane infirmity, (Gods honour onely being concerned in that) Whereas on the other side, Divine goodness makes a large allowance for a well-meant error, (because the understanding, like the eye, cannot so easily see its own blemishes) but is severe against even a little crime, men being more enabled for a discovery of that.

To say therefore, that *Arius* (who in the manner of his death seem'd the Antitype of *Judas*, his bowels gushing out when he went to serve the necessities of Nature) proclaim'd the displeasure of God against his doctrine; or that that house in *Black-Fryers*, which sunk down under the weight of those many Papists there assembled with their Priest to attend the offices of their Religion, and buried them in its ruines, was Gods warning against Popery; or that the births (though granted monstrous beyond the possibilities of Nature) which M<sup>rs</sup> *Hutchinson* and M<sup>rs</sup> *Dyer* (the two great Prophetesses & Leaders to the Anabaptistical faction in *New-England*) were delivered of, singled out their Opinion, and were visible reproofs from heaven of *Anabaptism* it self, is to interpret the voice of Gods rods by blinde and uncertain ghesles, and to repeat the vanity of that Emperour who would fetter the sea; for we hereby determine the large and deep thoughts of infinite Wisdom by those little maxims, short thoughts and ends, our selves usually attend unto. God never menac'd any such reproachfull judgement against any such errors as these, in Scripture; and if he had, if found in conjunction with great crimes, it may be more reasonably presum'd, that it was directed rather against the wickedness of the heart then the weakness of the head.

If I would advise with my eyes in the choice of my party or Opinion, I should rather observe (as I could) what parties of men are most delivered to the judgement of a cruel and unquiet spirit, to a giddy motion from one fond notion to another, who they are which seem most forsaken of vertue and true goodness. For these are spiritual judgements, and so, more suitable to the condition of that spiritual Oecotomy, the appearance of our Saviour hath now put us under. Besides, the Spirit of truth may (nay, usually doth) dwell with great sufferings, but great sins give suspicion of its departure. But even this also, upon trial will approve it self but the best of bad rules to proceed by in the trial of causes: for the enormity of mens lives (like dirty hands) may soyl and blemish the jewel of a good cause, not lessen and sink its intrinsick worth and value; and indifferent men will be ready to conclude it a falling cause which catcheth at such weak and unfaithfull holds. A good cause like a souldier (not well appointed) receives more hurt from the reggs of its own rotten armour, then the bullet of an Adversary; is more disparag'd (I mean) by a weak and insufficient defence, then a strong and subtile argument; (which is often thought to hold more of the pregnancy of the disputant then the cause).

I Pet. 4.14.

Secondly,

See the Story  
at large in  
Gouge his  
three Arrows.

Secondly, Judgements extraordinary overtaking persons, evidently guilty of extraordinary crimes, are to be regarded as the evidences of Gods providence, and high displeasure against those sins. God generally commits all spiritual judgement to his Son, and all temporal judgement to the Magistrate ( who therefore hath Gods title, and is said to judge in his stead ) But sometimes ( as Kings, who yet have their Vice-gerents ) he is pleased to sit as it were in open judicature himself, and to correct a high and daring crime, with his own immediate stroke. Which he doth either when the sword of justice is permitted to rust in its scabbard, and the Magistrate neglects to put open wickedness to shame, or when perhaps he is unable, through a want of knowledge or power to reach the criminal; or in his total absence, thus in the primitive times, when the Magistrate ( being Heathen ) thought not any sin against the Gospel, to be *fori sui*, 2 Cor. 10. 6. he invested his publick Ministers with a power which reach'd *εἰς* 1 Cor. 5. 5. *οὐεδέπον τῆς συρκός*, to the affliction or destruction of the flesh, upon bold and hopeless offenders.

Now these judgements extraordinary, are Vocal and Emphatical, and call for our more serious notices in three cases especially;

i. When the judgement bears upon it the evident pourtrayures and figures of the sin. The cross men bear ( like that of our Saviour ) often carries the inscription of the crime in such plain and legible characters, that he that runs may read it. There are some herbs which bear upon them *Naturæ signaturas*, certain signatures and marks stamp'd upon them by the hand of Nature, serving ( as a kinde of native labels ) to tell us what vertues they contain, and whereby it may be known ( even upon sight ) to what diseases or parts of the body ill affected, they are proper and usefull ( because bearing some figures or colours analogous to them ) thus punishment sometimes carries *signaturas peccati*, and proclaims by its very make and fashion, what sin it is intended to discover and cure in us: And this it doth either when there is a *ταύτη θλίψις*, a suffering in the very same instances and ways wherein men sinn'd, and the cross is ( as it were ) shap'd out of the forbidden tree whereby they offend. Thus David's adultery was punish'd in Absalom's incest; Pharaoh who would have all the males drown'd, was himself drown'd; and the wickedness of Abimelech in slaying his 70 brethren was returned upon his own head in that strange and violent death whereby he perish'd. God is pleased so frequently to punish men thus, that the \* Prophets often seem to foretell a judgement, rather by \* Is. 33. 1. Jer. a rational attendance to the condition of the sin, then by a Divine 24. 17. Joel 3. afflatus. \* In such examples of Divine justice, Gods rod hath a voice 7, 8. 1 Sam. as well as a smart, and it becomes us to be his notice-takers, and 15. 33. Hab. 2. not ( with the Philistines, 1 Sam. 6. 9. ) nickname the most apparent hand of God, a chance which hath happened; and that we may 15, 16. Mic. 1. 7. Jer. 48. 26,

27. \* *Quod evidenter Dei iudicium esse potuit, quād ut triumphum præsumens, triumphus fieret, &c. & ut quicquid se facturum usurparat, ipse pateretur?* Salv. de Gub. Dei. 1. 5. speaking of the Rom. Capt,

not

Jer. 5. 19.

V. M<sup>r</sup> Medes

Serm. on

Jud. 1. 7.

not be thought to censure our Brother, turn charitable Atheists. Or 2. the judgement may proclaim the sin, when there is an *Omnis*, when the judgement seems the symbol of the sin, and justice pays men in value though not in kinde. Thus God threatened the Israelites, that as they had served strange Gods in their own land, so should they serve strangers in a land not their own. Solomon serv'd God with a divided heart, and but half his Kingdom goes to his posterity. When we see the scandalous sinner corrected thus by his own wickedness, and made even to drink the dust of his own Idol, we should make a pious meditation on the occasion.

2. When the judgement surpriseth the sinner in the very acting of his wickedness, and sin the off-spring destroys its parent (as it is said of the viper) in the very production. When the false swearer is immediately stricken by God, and the blasphemers tongue suddenly curst into silence, and death sent to make the Oppressour vomit up his newly stollen morsels, when Herod and Nebuchadnezzar have their sin and punishment bearing an equal date, (In short) when justice thus lays aside its leaden feet, and treads close upon the heels of the offender; God intends to learn us some great lesson in the example; and it is a signe we are past feeling if we can see him thus cutting off now one and then another member of our common body without some shrinking, and religious sense thereof in our selves.

3. When the judgement is such as the general experience of times proves the usual consequent of such a crime. As a sudden and untimely death of sedition, the ruine of estates of Sacriledge, an antedated and diseased old age of riot and drunkenness, an almost general impenitency of uncleanness, a naked and expos'd posterity of oppression and unrighteous gain, strange discoveries and an infamous death of bloud shed, neglect and scorn of men of a great ambition, the blasting of designs which proceed upon the violation of the religion of national compacts, an untimely and strange death of cruel and bloody persecutions. Gods judgements are generally a great deep (the reasons of them past our sounding) but his righteousness is sometimes as the great mountains, visible to the dullest eye, in the judgements wherewith he corrects, those sins especially which fall most directly cross to his government of the world.

Isa. 62. 6.

Verul. de  
Augm. Sci-  
ent. l. 2. c. II.

Psal. 140. II.

**הנּזְבָּדִים אֶת־יְהוָה**  
 It will become us now to own our selves Gods Recorders to register in a pious remembrance all such great displays of his justice in the world. Such extraordinary judgements are intended Gods testimonies to his providence and righteousness, and the writing of them in the dust, is none of the least causes of Atheism in the world. And therefore a learned Personage (not without good reason) reports it as a great defect, that there is not yet extant an *Historia Nemesis*, a judicious and well attested history of the divine vengeance, containing the most remarkable monuments of Gods justice, in which it might appear how evil hath hunted, (as it were through many turnings of affairs and mazes of life) the violent person and at last overthrew him. A dull and stupid inobservance of

of such examples of Divine justice ( a looking at them all but as the Psal. 10. 5. 28. casual drops of misery falling from that common cup in the hand of God, 4, 5. 59. 13. Psal. 75. 8. indifferently upon good and bad, ) stands often ar- Isa. 26. 11. reign'd in Scripture as a very great sin. 66. 24.

What hath been spoken ( to prevent any corruption of judgement or practice ) must be taken with a grain or two of salt. Zeph. 3. 5.

1. Where no particular sin of any blacker die appears in the life of our afflicted Brother, we must not presume from an inspection of the condition and figures of the judgement, to draw up any particular charge against him. Job 34. 26, 27. Mic. 6. 9.

We are not as soon as ever God writes bitter things against our neighbour ( as Job phraseth it ) rashly to undertake to expound the particular sense and meaning of the writing; lest we call that a scorpion, which God intends a rod, and that an instance of wrath, which is intended but an exercise of Grace. Gods judgements often come forth upon errands which they to whom they are sent, may better understand then persons unconcern'd. We are not to conclude the punishment from the sin, ( saying, *Thus and thus hath such a man done and it will come home by him*) this is to prescribe time and measure to the justice of God; neither may we infer the sin from the punishment ( intituling some such great evil of sin to such an evil of punishment ) for God may give a good man his *evil*, as to a bad man his *good things*, in this world. But where we are as sure from Scripture ( not fancy, apt to abuse us where our selves are concern'd ) that the sin is extraordinary, as we are from sense that the judgement is such, we may then cry out with the followers of the Lamb, Rev. 15. 4. *All nations shall worship before thee, O Lord, for thy Judgements are made manifest.*

2. Care must be had that no such observations be leaven'd with any uncharitable sentence upon our Brothers final estate. A great judgement on his body, may be intended a great mercy to his soul, and perhaps the shame and misery of this life may commute for hell. *u77a's* zeal might further the salvation of his soul, while the indiscretion thereof brought a fearfull destruction upon his body.

## SECT. II.

### Prodigies Penal how to be interpreted.

Three conclusions more to direct to a right understanding in reference to Prodigies penal. Four instances of Gods extraordinary judgements upon the adversaries of his Gospel. The singularity of Gods judgements upon the Jewish Nation, wherein appearing. Extraordinary judgements no conclusive arguments against a cause now, and why: Why usually thought they are? The words of our Saviour, Luk. 13. 1, 2. in reference to the Galileans, explain'd. The judgement upon them, whether a figne of the time to that generation? Lesser National judgements, arguments

to repentance no signs of the time. Temporal judgements on Nations more argumentative under the Old Testament than the New. Religious arguments to be managed with coolness and candour.

Conclus. 3.

**T**He third Conclusion to direct to a right understanding in reference to Prodigies penal, is this. Judgements singular and miraculous, surprising persons in defence of a cause, evidently devoted in Scripture to destruction may be regarded as partial testimonies from heaven against it. It is readily acknowledg'd that there is light enough in Scripture to distinguish doctrines and causes by, but yet where God hath been pleas'd by any such mighty judgements to open the eyes of men to a clearer perception of it, and to hold them in a more serious attendance thereunto, they are not to overlook it, for fear they appear to seek a signe from heaven, or to offer weak men an encouragement to wrest the darker works of Providence, (as they do the words of Scripture) to the ends of superstition and some little interests and Opinions to which they engross the favours of Heaven.

To serve the more distinct understanding of this conclusion, I shall propose these few examples.

Socrat. Hist.  
I. 3. c. 17.

1. When the Jews, in the assistance of Julian the Emperour, assayed the restoring of their ruin'd Temple and so to oppose Moses to Christ, God miraculously determined the controversy; for the fire (which used before, to come forth from him to consume the sacrifice, now) came and consum'd their intended Temple, and Altars, destroyed the workmen about it, and their several instruments, and the whole designe was blasted by such terrible appearances of God against it, that many Jews were perswaded by that visible argument against Judaism, to entertain the faith of Christ.

\* Dio. Hist.  
I. 66.

Zeph. 2. 11.

Postquam

Imp Rom. cœ-

perunt de in-

dustria, Chri-

stianos abster-

rere à Chri-

sto, nunquam

aut pauci co-

rum aut nullus

ferè siccâ mor-

te descendit

ad Generum

Cereris. Ca-

mero. de

verb. Dei.

P. 444.

2. That terrible fire which issued out of the ground in the second year of Titus (not long after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple) and laid in ashes the Temples of Jupiter Capitolinus, Neptune, Isis, Serapis, the Pantheon, &c. and their other devoted places, was so strange an instance, that the \* Ethnick Historian makes this judgement thereupon, *Malum id divinum potius quam humanum videtur fuisse*, and was (in all likelihood) regarded by the Christians of that time, as a signe that no cause or Religion (Ethnick or Jewish) should be able to stand before the Christian; and that the day foretold, wherein \* God would famish all the Gods of the earth, and men should worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen, was illis bene fuit, just now a dawning.

3. That almost constant succession of \* Romane Emperours, whose robes (for the space of three hundred years) were dy'd in their own bloud shed by the hand of violence, seems an instantia monastica in Providence, and to carry much of a miracle with it; and may be receiv'd as an argument of Gods controversy with them for the butchering of so many of his innocent sheep, under their bloody government. (though perhaps some will entertain the example but with common thoughts, because of the circumstances the Empire was then in.).

4. There

4. There is no Nation under heaven whose sins God hath visited upon them with a judgement of so private and reserv'd a condition, as that of the Jews, whether respect be had, to the nature or season thereof.

1. There is a singularity therein in regard of the *nature of it*. Few is become throughout the whole world; rather *nomen Odii quam Gentis*. They are now as much scatter'd over the World, as before impal'd and distinguisht from it. They alone live in banishment, wheresoever they come. Now their becoming thus (like Cain) vagabonds and fugitives upon earth, (which no Nation besides is) speaks them like him gone out of Gods presence; and guilty of some horrible murder, even no less then that of the *Lord of life*, which the scripture chargeth upon them.

2. There is a singularity in the judgement upon them, in regard of the *Season* thereof. For before they had stain'd their hands in the bloud of the Lord of the Temple, their Temple (though sometimes defac'd) was never made vile and contemptible by any abomination of the heathen, set up in the most Holy. No war, no sedition, no captivity, no vastation, nor any other sad occasion whatsoever, made so great a wast upon the religion and reverence of that place, that an idol or image (against the essential sanctity thereof) should be tendered to worship therein (as Agrippa in his Embassy to Caius the Emperour largely tells him) for that the very heathens had been tutor'd into a reverence thereof, by those fearful judgements, which (as he there tells him) they had observed the King of heaven alway avenging any lesser indignities offer'd to that his chamber of special presence; But no sooner had they committed that wonderfull and horrible thing, but God delivers the place of his ancient habitation, the desire of their eyes, to the defilements and dishonour of an image that the Emperour, erected in the Holy of Holies, as a sign that place should no longer be his rest because it was polluted, and that he had forsaken both it and them. Moreover, most constant were the judgements which at last befel the enemies of the Jewish Nation, before their great sin of rejecting the son of God. Israel was then holiness to the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase, all that devour'd him did offend, evil came upon them from the Lord. Whereas afterward so constant their successes, when attempting upon them, as if to fight against that nation, were the only way of obliging victory, and the assistances of God. Which singularity in the divine judgements, was a sign that God had now put a period to the Jewish worship, and that their putting of Christ to death, lookt of a blacker colour in the eyes of Justice, as procuring more dreadfull evils upon them then all their other sins could ever doe.

I easily foresee how ready some persons may be to build hay and stubble upon this foundation, and to conclude such a cause or party branded from heaven, if any judgement (like an executioner in a vizard) frightfull as well as fatall, befall the persons appearing in defence thereof. And therefore I must here minde them how inconsequent any such reasonings can be, not only because I more then

Ποῖοι οὐ Θεοὶ<sup>Θ</sup>  
παργέντιαι  
ἀπὸ τῶν ιδίων  
μηλεπόλεως,  
καὶ τὰ οἰκεῖα  
τῶν, τὴν πα-  
τρούς θρη-  
σκεία ή μόνοι  
ἴσθαι;

Orig. Cont.

Cels. l. 2.  
Οὐ σάσις, εἰ  
πόλεμοι, εἰχ  
ἀλωσίς, εἰ  
πέριθοις, εἰ καὶ  
ἄλλο τοῦ οὐτου  
χρήστην εἰνεκέ-  
ειστε πότε εἰπεῖς  
εἰς τὸν νεώρ-  
ων ἀγαλμα,  
η Σέανον, η πί-  
τη χειρομη-  
των ιδεύσατε,  
&c.

Philo. Jud.  
de legat. ad  
Caium Imp.  
Mic. 2. 10.  
Jer. 2. 3.  
Vid. D. Jack-  
son Creed.  
l. 1. c. 19.  
& c. 23.

doubt whether any of the judgements they can instance in touch in any points and angles of similitude those already mention'd, and because they came not forth to decide causes collaterally, but diametrically oppos'd (not differences between *Paul* and *Cephas*, but *God* and *Belial*) but because Judaism and Gentilism were causes evidently devoted in sacred scripture, and the judgements following them were but the accomplishments of its predictions, and the executions of a scripture sentence upon them. But we have now no better warrant to infer the goodness or badness of some lesser causes and opinions men espouse, from the judgements which may sometimes overtake the assertors of them, then to make judgement of the loyalty of a wife, by a *water of jealousy*. For as sometimes the Person may fall in the cause (because that is displeasing to God) thus *Zosiba* fell in the expedition against the King of Egypt; so sometimes the cause may fall in the person (because he is displeasing to God) as the Israelites in the controversy with the men of *Benjamin*. Besides, we are to presume that God speaks to us more plainly by his providence, then by his word, wherein he hath permitted some lesser matters to stand in a very doubtfull light, to engage us to an exercise of our understandings to find the truth, and of our charities to those who (having not such strong and excercised senses as our selves) chance to mistake it.

It were therefore heartily to be wisht, that men had that largeness of heart, as not to think heaven and earth concern'd in the standing or falling of their little interests and persuasions; that they would leave off (that worst kind of enclosure) the entailing salvation solely upon their own party; and not goe about to hedge in the Holy Dove, by appropriating the graces and influences thereof to themselves. For then men would not be so prone to believe Gods judgements design no higher then the service of their little passions and animosities, and that he is as little able to forbear and make allowance for the mistakes and infirmities of men, as themselves.

## Conclus. 4.

*Personal judgements extraordinary, are to be regarded as Gods visible sermons of repentance to a multitude under the guilt of the same or greater sins.* The great *Lord of Hosts*, sometimes decimates a multitude of offenders, and discovers in the personal sufferings of a few what all deserve, and may (without repentance) expect: Now as the ends of brands are noted to shed forth their tears in a kind of sad sense of the loss of those parts which the fire hath already seaz'd, thus they which are (in the phrase of scripture) as *brands pluckt* (for the present) *out of the fire*, should express a christian sense of the falls and of the sins of those persons which God was pleas'd to make their proxies in correction. Great judgements are not to be interpreted so much the signs of our brothers sins, as the reproofs of our own. Because the pregnant example of the *Gaiileans* [occurring Luk. 13.] may lend a great light and strength both to the particular conclusion before us, and our general argument, it will be no undervaluing of our pains to paraphrase a little upon our Saviours words upon the occasion.

Vers. 1. There were present at that time, some that told Him of the Galileans, whose bloud Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

2. And Jesus answering said unto them suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things?

3. I tell you nay but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

[Ωὐαὶ τοῖς Στολεῖς] which words I choose (with Grotius) to render, ad modum eundem, after the same manner, for I conceive our Saviour doth not vary his speech [vers. 5.] when discoursing of those which perisht by the tower of Siloam, thus [ὑποίως Στολεῖς] ye shall perish ad modum similem, in a manner like them, but upon some reason of moment, which I thus explain.

These Galileans were a faction of Judas of Galilee (of whom we read. Act. 5. 37.) whose great doctrine it was, that it was unlawfull ὀφεγγή τοῖς Ρωμαίοις τελεῖν, to pay tribute to the Romans, or to acknowledge μῆτα τὸν θεόν δυνάσθε σωτῆρας, any mortal Lords after God had been their King, or to offer sacrifice for the Romane Governours: Joseph. de Bel. Judaic. l. 2. c. 12. Now Pilate (provokt by the dishonours or the dangers wrapt up in this doctrine) stains the Altar with the bloud of these seditious sacrificers, setting upon them now come to Hierusalem to attend the religion of the paschal rites. Now this personal judgement was a little Map wherein the lines and figures of that terrible calamity which afterward fell upon the whole Nation, were excellently represented; some of them perishing ad modum eundem, and others ad modum similem. For as these Galileans perisht on the feast of Passover in a sedition varnisht over with the specious colours and pretences of religion and conscience, so did a great part of the Nation afterward fall in a rebellion against Cæsar for Gods sake, [pious pretences that they especially were Abrahams children, God's free people, and to pay no sanctuary shekel to a Heathen Ruler.] and that on the very passover day, in the Temple the place of sacrifice. And the persons upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell, were a kind of type of the many thousands besides, which perisht in the ruins of the City (of which that Tower carried the image and representation) in which they were surpriz'd by the Roman army; so that they did perish [ὑποίως] in a manner similar unto them.

Concerning which strange examples, I must confess I see no reason to receive them (with the Reverend D. Jackson) absolutely and in themselves consider'd, as any intended signs of the time to that Generation; nor doe I think the Jews had any ground to think those sad accidents τύποι σωμέτου εκείνοις happened unto them as any true and proper types and figures of an analogous destruction to fall upon themselves in the revolution of a few years: for could any mere man certainly foresee, or but suspect, that any such storms and shours of evils would suddainly fall upon the Jewish state, upon the rising of this cloud no bigger then a mans hand (the death of a few private and inconsiderable persons?) As a forain Divine speaking of the English art of preaching said truly, *plus est in Artifice quam in arte*, it derives more from the Artist, then any set rules of art; so we may say upon our Saviours prophecies and foresight exprest upon this occasion,

Vid: Grot.  
in loc.

In Serm:  
on Luk. 13.  
1, 2, 3.

*2 Kings 13.  
18.*

*plus fuit in significante quam in signo:* His prophetick paraphrase upon that sign, gave it that significancy and expressiveness, which of it self it had not; the type speaking no more (without the divine gloss and sanction) then the smiting of any King upon the ground three times with an arrow, now, signifies that he shall smite his enemies three times, because the the instance was once by Gods appoyntment) a happy *Omen* of such a blessing to a King of Israel.

But howsoever, the Jews ought to have seen the sword of God in the hand of *Pilate*, in that sad example, to have consider'd that while he (like the leech) drew all this bloud to serve his own bloody and revengfull Nature, the great Physitian intended it as medicinal to the body of the nation, to teach them the wisdom of a speedy repentance therein, least a like or greater judgement *should surprize* themselves: and the rather, because so guilty of the same sin [the hiding of the sword of sedition in the *Ephod* of religion and conscience toward God] and not seeing their fellows secur'd from the arrest of Judgement by the religion of an Altar, and the prerogative of a Temple. All Gods judgements upon others, come forth upon purposes of grace, and are intended but as the cutting and lancing of one member, to draw away the corrupt humours from the rest.

*Conclus. 5.*

*1 Joel. 12.*

Fifthly, *Lesser national judgements are to be regarded as the signs of Gods present displeasure, and as his summons to repentance.* Scripture makes mention of Gods cutting of a Nation short [*2 Kings 10. 32.*] and of his cutting of them off [*Jer. 44. 11.*] the instruments whereby he doth the former, are very intemperate seasons, murrains of cattle, Epidemical diseases, long dearths, great defeats of Armies, &c. For as there are *Vitia Hominum & vitia Temporum*, the vices and follies of men taken asunder, and of men consider'd as a body, and under such common and moveable circumstances; so there are *Mala Hominum*, the evils which fall upon the lots of private men, and *Mala temporum*, the evils of the Times, the Judgements which ceaze and touch men as united and meeting in one common body and interest and under the guilt of some publick and National impiety.

*Joel. 1. 15.*

*17.*

*Nullam peni-  
tus Romani  
Orbis aut Ro-  
mani nominis  
partem, quam-  
libet graviter  
unquam fuisse  
correctam, &c.*

Now these are I say to be received, by the common sense of a Nation, as Gods warning pieces to come in and submit themselfes to him, by repentance, least he storme them by some more black and terrible judgement. For God sometimes deals by Nations as with persons, who are first brought to a *Council*, next to a *Judgement*, then to hell-fire. The great day of destruction from the Almighty (foretold by the Prophet) was usher'd by these lesser evils, the cutting off the meat from before their eyes, the rotting of the seeds under the clods, &c. And before God layd the Axe to the root of that fair tree [the Jewish Church] he was pleased many years to chop and prune it by those fruitfulness might be corrected. And that shewr of vengeance which at last overwhelm'd the Romane Empire, was prefac'd by some final-lerdrops. It lay long in the fire of many heavy afflictions, but (like Salv. l. 5. De the clay whereby it is emblem'd Dan. 2. 42.) it lost nothing of its impure and drossy nature; and at last this incorrigibleness brought on

on its final ruine and execution by the Barbarous Nations of the North.

I say not, that these instances can warrant us alway to receive all such lesser judgements, as the tokens and harbingers of much greater, and (to borrow the language of the Prophet) *as the swellings out in a high wall, whose breaking is coming suddenly*: For God often makes great sins the triumphs of his goodness, and lays a very sad ground (in some lesser evils) when he purposeth to lay on his *fair colours of peace and happiness*. He causeth it sometimes at even (when darker and blacker times were expected) *to be light*. Besides, the unchurching or unpeopling of a Nation (his greater judgements) are ways which under this spiritual Oeconomy, the Divine Justice seldom walks in. God indeed heretofore, (when the world, in the greener years thereof, was most under the conduct of its lower faculties, and most apt to be drawn or driven by rewards or punishments temporal) singled out the Jewish Nation, in whose outward state of prosperity or adversity, to read visible lectures of Divinity and obedience to the Nations round about; and that the Nations might take the fairer view of their state God tells them, Ezek. 5. 5, 6, 7, 8. that he had plac'd *Jerusalem* in the midst of the Nations round about her: and that they might call the eyes of the world the more upon them, their plagues were such as scarce admitted their parallel instances. But God chooseth now generally to punish incorrigibleness under temporal by spiritual judgements. He sometimes delivers a people (like *Samson*) to blindness and stupidity, who having been often bound by the cords of their [Delilah] sins (as Solomon speaks) would never take warning. When ever therefore the smoke of Gods lesser judgements, speaks his anger to be kindled but a little, we are to express a quick sense thereof, and endeavour its quenching by a speedy removal of the fuel, those National sins which may continue and increase it. God will account with men one day, not onely for the abuse of National mercies, but National judgements.

And thus (by Gods assistance) have I issued my meditations upon both parts of the Argument, and offered the best defence I could to the cause I undertook (too just and good to be lost for a *Nihil dicit*) Upon a review whereof, I am not conscious to my self of having trespass'd against the Apostolical precept by returning upon our Adversaries railing for railing, and of giving any suspicion of the weakness of my cause or Arguments, by calling in passion or reproaches to their relief and assistance. They which think an argument pierceth the less, because not manag'd with some keeness of style, may as well think a rasour cuts the worse, for having its rough and grating edge a little taken off. The truth is, I apprehended not any such mountainous difficulties at any time in my way, that I should need (like *Hannibal* in the *Alps*) to force a passage through them with fire and vineger, (any hot and tart expressions and reflections.)

Isa. 30. 13.

Isa. 43. 24.

54. 11.

Tò γε εθνῶν ἀ-  
παύτων, τόπο  
(Ἴερσιν)  
έθνος, θεο-  
γνωσίας ἐξε-  
γγίγνεται Διόδ-  
ονταλον ὁ Θε-  
ός. Theodor.  
Orat. 10. de  
Provid.

Lam. 4. 6.

Mat. 24. 21.

Prov. 5. 22.

1 Pet. 3. 9.

## CHAP. VII.

## The Conclusion.

The Omission of a particular enquiry into the truth and consequence of some late strange relations, excused. The undertaking proved needless, difficult, unprofitable. Relations of matters wonderfull why greatly liable to suspicion. The Caution of the superstitious Heathens in receiving such stories, noted. Men most apt to be abused with such relations, where Religion is concerned in them. The excellent manner of relating wonders, in Sacred Writ. The conviction of an Enthusiast or a Superstitious person, why greatly difficult. Projectours almost in every Science. Why so readily attended to? The Philosophical study of Prodigies commended. An acquiescence in the present dispensations of Providence, an effectual remedy against curiosity.

IT might possibly be expected that this discourse should have touch'd more closely upon the occasion, and have come to a more distinct view, and particular examination of (at least) some of those strange relations which of late, have been prest upon the faith of the Nation, with so great a confidence, and so troublesom an importunity. An undertaking which I purposely declined, looking at it as *Needless, Difficult, and Unprofitable*.

First, *As in it self, Needless*: For, (besides that I think it hard to finde a faith that can swallow any such Camel-stories, as many of them in all the circumstances with which they are swell'd out, appear to be) there are no relations in the world, which we may with greater reason, arrest upon suspicion of imposture, then such as these are. And that

1. Because of the ignorance of the greater part of their Attestours, in natural Philosophy. Now where men look upon an object (strange and prodigious) through so gross and thick a medium, it is no trespass against charity to believe they sometimes report them beyond their proper and just figures and dimensions. It is the nature of ignorance *fingere simul & credere*.

2. Religion seems much concerned in such relations. Now men (like Jacob) will be ready to venture upon a lie for a great blessing [the advancement of Religion]. Besides, as Atheism gives all events to the second, so Superstition (Religion scar'd out of its wits) gives all solely to the first cause, and is therefore quickly perswaded to fill out its relations with all the examples of wonderfull and extraordinary, that effects may appear the more worthy of the immediate power of God. Moreover, blinde and ignorant fears of God, make the minde impressive to any kinde of religious Legends. Never was the world more truly *λευτεράτων καὶ σοφισμάτων χώρα*, (as Philo styles it) a Region of lies and fallacies, then in the more dark and ruder times of Gentilism and Popery, when an ignorant devotion toward God had made Religion almost nothing but a continued history of prodigies,

gies, apparitions, miracles, voices from the clouds, and the like : and therefore the Lord Bacon, advising a just history of Prodigies, to direct to the true interpretation of Nature and knowledge of causes, Nov. Organ. 1. 2. Aphor. gives in this prudent Caveat, *Maxime habenda sunt pro suspectis quæ pendent quomodounque à Religione, ut prodigia Livii, &c.* ( Superstition (as it is said of the viper), bites off that head, weakens and softens that faculty of reason, by which it did at first conceive, and makes it receptive of any odd fancies and impressions.

3. The strength of these Relations (like that of *Nisus* in the Poet) lies generally in the weak hair of some single or double testimony. Now as there is little reason to conceive a whole Nation concern'd in the visions of one or two private persons, if they were true (Gods signs and wonders which were intended as lessons to a Nation, or posterity, being generally attested by numbers;) so as little reason to hang the weight of so serious a faith and great affections in Religion upon so slender a wire, as the testimony of one, perhaps two, or three men (in such matters) is. The *Romanes* of old, though as apt to swallow such prodigious stories as any, yet used to chew them first by a serious examination (sometimes by the publick Magistrate) made of the credit of the Attestours, and truth of the Relations. And we shall finde (*in Livy*) prodigious accidents sometimes past by without any religious regards, *viz.* where the testimony appear'd incompetent; and this, lest what was intended a devotion to their Deities, might chance to prove a mockery.

4. Some men seem even naturally, fabularum proci, the very courtiers of fables, and Legends. Either out of a native vanity and emptiness of minde, whereby (like the *Cameleon*) they are better pleased with Quidam in-aery then substantial nourishment: or a mean kinde of ambition of being look'd at and stared upon by the ruder multitude, who (in all likelihood) would negle&t them if their books and discourses were not somewhat antick and extraordinary. Hence the men can scarce credibilium relatu, com-mendationem parant, & Le-torem aliud quotidiana acturum, si per-

Very observable therefore, the manner of the relation of any great wonders, in Sacred Writ; wherein we shall finde the most glorious displays of the Divine power, delivered in that simplicity and coolness of style, in that lax and general way, with as little of ecstasy and emotion of minde appearing in the Relatour, as if some vulgar and quotidian occurrence had fallen before him: that so there might not appear any symptoms of that common itch in men to tell strange stories, or any affectation of strangeness and the common wonder, or a great solicitousness to raise the esteem of that cause or party, to which they were an honourable testimony from heaven, in the minds of men.

Secondly, Such an undertaking would prove exceeding difficult. It being much more easy to beleive many a strange story, then to attempt its refute; especially where the Scene thereof is laid at a great distance off. Besides, very difficult it is to make any steady judgement

of some Prodigies, without an actual presence to them; such are *the water of ponds, or fountains turn'd (as it is pretended) into bloud, the interruption of the current of rivers, some spots as of bloud, discovered upon stones or statues, &c.* the causes of which appearances, will scarce be ever hit, by persons which stand at a great distance, and understand not the condition of the season, climate, water, earth, when and where the events fell out.

3. The undertaking would have proved very unserviceable to our main purpose, for,

1. Our designe was not the disparagement of the Persons of our Adversaries (of which any attempt upon their credit would have been indicted) but of their cause.

2. A solicitous enquiry into the truth of the Relations, would have been concluded a tacit acknowledgement of the value and signification of them, if they should chance to prove truths.

3. Having cut off the neck of this Opinion [those precarious principles it holds of] a cutting off the particular heads, [monstrous relations] which grow upon it, would be needless; nay endless, for others would quickly rise up in their places.

4. We have (as Tarquinius did the heads of the taller poppies) directly struck at the credit and signification of the most eminent and pretending Prodigies, [Comets and Apparitions]

5. I conceiv'd that more words would have been but lost upon persons, which (after all that hath been said) have a great devotion for this ancient Idol [the Opinion of Presages by Prodigies.] Speculative errors generally scorn the truth, practical errors hate it, but it is the usage of Superstition and Enthusiasm to fear it: because in the two former, self onely, but in the latter God is presum'd especially concern'd; All the images and fictions of the brain (like those in the fancies of Poets) being translated presently into heaven; and Gods honour and counsels thought to stand or fall with them.

6. Because as for persons of more free and unengaged minds, and that use not to believe without asking themselves *why*, I was not without some hopes that what hath been already discours'd in this Argument, may suffice to their resolution and satisfaction. Upon all which accounts, I did not conceive it necessary to concern my self in any solicitous enquiries into the truth or falsehood of particular relations, or a tedious discovery of the lightness and insignificancy of them singly, and a part; and so to kill this Superstition (as they do some kinde of vermin) by parts and pieces.

After all that hath been already said, before I conclude the Readers task and my own, I conceive it necessary to call him to a notice of that strong and almost catholick propension in our nature, (against the reproaches even of our understanding part, and the loud voice of a great experience) to entertain with a kinde of sacred regard, persons who assume to themselves an ability to do or know hugely beyond the common standard of humane attainments. Of which kinde of Mountebanks, there never wanted examples in all Arts and

*Philosophi superstitiosi & penè Fanatici, quidvis malle videntur quam se esse ineptos.*

Tul. de Div.

I. 2.

and Sciences. In *Astronomy*, we are detain'd with the vain words of some that tell us of a *Scriptura coelestis*, of the fates and destinies of Nations and Princes, the issues of any great Actions, written upon the great scroll of heaven, and plainly legible by the *Sons of Art*: of a way and method of deriving down and continuing the vertues of Planets and Constellations in certain images prepared according to art. In *Natural Philosophy*, we are as much abused by others, which tell us of a way to procure Prophetical dreams, to exalt all bodies into gold, to make mighty impressions upon the air, to advance imagination to a capacity of working wonders both upon the minds of men, and (even greatly distant) bodies: of an art to read and expound all the cryptick *lines* in your hand and face. In *Medicks*, we have some confident undertakers to rescue the Science from all its reproaches and dishonours, nay to cut off the very entail of death from mankinde. In *Science in General*, we meet with some of the sons of pride which tell us of an *Ars magna*; a *Pansophia*; a method to bless man with the real substance of that happiness. [A universal knowledge] the catching at whose vain and flying shadow cost him the loss of Paradise. In *Divinity*, Gad, behold a troupe cometh of persons which begin their enquiries where all wise men make an end [Cabalists], pretenders to Revelations, to an understanding of signs, and mysterious prophecies, strange providences, things to come, the pretended mysteries wrapt up in the sacred numbers and names, the intent and meaning of Prodigies, some more spiritual discoveries and mysterious notions in Religion, &c.

All which pretenders to a *n' πιασδύ*, somewhat beyond the common size of humane ability, men are easily perswaded into great thoughts of, either because *in magnis vel voluisse mirandum*, or because all these pretences are but the many and various repeats of that first and most inviting temptation [the promise of a more rais'd and excellent knowledge, then we have already] or because the general ignorance of such pretenders, helps them to set off their wares and themselves, with a great *confidence*, which hath the power of fascination upon weaker minds, persons not secured by the countercharm of a great knowledge and resolution.

And therefore I think it not safe to trust the constancy of our minds against all opinion of Prophecies, Omens, Signs of times, Presages by Prodigies, as also those other *Splendidæ nugæ* (nearly related to them) just now mentioned, solely with reason and argument. It is a little necessary to confront a kinde of sullen resolution, *against*, to an almost obstinate propension of minde towards them. And if men would once value their Understandings so far, as to call all such husky and curious arts and studies (as the *Chaldee Oracle* doth all divinations; by the *Exira*, the motions of birds, smoke, &c. &c.)

--- Αθύματα πάντα

*Eυποίεινς ἀπάντη σκέψαματα* ---  
but the recreations and entertainments of children, and the weak supports of the gainfull trade of cheating and imposture, they would all (like fables which want Auditours) quickly sink into darkness and

and silence : but as long as there are any persons in the world troubled with the fits of the first Mother (curiosity and pride) there will never be wanting some that will thrust any such rotten and unsavoury stuff under their noses.

If men were once perswaded into a great resolution against all such subtle vanities, and difficult impertinences, the price of real and substantial wisdom would quickly rise in the world ; and the Tree of Knowledge (these suckers which are ready to starve it, being once thrown off) would thrive and spread ; men, when they came to discourse, would be more sure of each others principles ; and Religion would be no longer render'd to the neglect and scorn of subtle men, because appearing to them but a cold form of some pitifull modes and observations, a system of blind fears, or lean and ignorant imaginations.

What hath been hitherto discourt (if it any where seem to hit) hath not been at all levell'd against the Philosophical study of Prodigies, or intended any disparagement of all sober inquiries into, or history of the Heteroclita Naturæ, preternatural generations, or any instantia variantes either in Heaven or Earth. It is to be wisht that there were a kind of Philosophy-office, wherein all such unusual occurrences were registered ; not in such fabulous and antick circumstances wherein they stand recorded in the writers of Natural Magick (designing nothing but wonder in their Readers), nor with a superstitious observation of any such dreadfull events with which such relations are usually stain'd, in the writers which intend a service to religion in them : But in such faithfull notices of their several circumstances, as might assist the understanding to make a true judgement of their Natures and Occasions. Such a History would serve the reprehension of several maximes in Philosophy, deliver'd upon a scanty, and hasty inspection of Nature (as presented to view but in some one posture) and would give Religion a freedom from its more dangerous (because less suspected Adversary) Superstition, for as a distinct and full view of second causes, begets religion ; (because necessarily directing the eye, at last, upon the First), a superficial and imperfect notice, Atheism, (which like the bat, is noted to flie abroad in the twilight, in a kind of middle state between the darkness of ignorance and light of knowledge) so, an utter ignorance of causes natural, leads (in more soft and impressive minds, especially) to superstition, a slavish observance of and blind devotion toward God.

All the words therefore which have been bestow'd upon this argument, have been directed solely to the discouraging of a superstitious study of the singularities in nature, and all regards of them as Prognosticks of any future evils, and approaching alterations in the state. Which that they may take the readier hold of the Reader (even blunt nayls will enter a soft and yielding matter) I doe with a great seriousness recommend to his affections and endeavours, A perfect complacency & acquiescence in all the present allotments of divine providence. For it is only when men are sick of things present, that they long for variety, and therefore have a very forward faith and affection for whatsoever

Verulam. de  
Augm. Scien.  
l. 2. c. 2.

whatsoever prophecies and signs seem to give them the hopes and promises thereof. As Nature hath seated in some bodies a kind of restless desire of change, and motion from their present state, so humour, (or interest) hath plac'd in some minds a kind of perpetual motion, an eternal desire of change and alteration: And therefore Prophecies, Omens, Stories of Prodigies, shall be readily attended to and contended for, for these things feed that humour, because encouraging in loosers the hopes of a better game by some new shuffling and cutting, and in all persons, not pleas'd with what pleaseth God, of a great change of affairs, in state.

Whereas a true son of wisdom, doth *αποκινητεῖ τὰ οὐρανῶν* (as the Moralist speaks) heartily kiss and embrace all the issues of the divine wisdom and goodness: for he is not so vain as to measure the wisdom and goodness of all the results of Gods counsels by the reference they bear to the little ends, interests, or opinions of so inconsiderable a piece of the world as himself; or to think his two eyes can see more then those many in the wheels of providence; He believes all events to be either good in themselves, or in their ends and issues. And therefore he can live quietly ex tempore, and possess himself in peace though in destitution of any signs and tokens, common prophecies or prodigies to tell him news, and to read to him the history of a future time. Sollicitous inquiries into the condition of times to come, are planted by curiosity, water'd by a great disgust of things before us, and receive increase from weak fears in reference to hereafter; against all which pestes animæ, a quick and active persuasion that the most High ruleth in the Kingdoms of men, and his wisdom and goodness preside in all affairs of the world, is an easy and perfect Antidote; and by consequence, against all regards to prodigies, Prophecies, Omens, the tokens and expressions of them.

Ezek. 10. 12.

Dan. 4. 17.

F I N I S.

## ERRATA.

### In PREFACE.

Pag. 3. l. 17. r. salving. p. 5. l. 7. after usurp insert upon.

### In TRACT.

Pag. 6. l. 16. r. born. p. 11. l. 30. r. upon after strike. p. 15. l. 20. r. and so instead of because. p. 16. l. 8 r. it after make. p. 17. l. 6. r. is for was. Et l. 18. r. owning. p. 22. l. 27. r. out after laid. p. 31. l. 8 r. fiery. l. 22. pascitur. p. 35. l. 8. insert the words of, after the. p. 41. l. 12. r. stands after world. l. 13. pillows. p. 57. l. 17. place the comma after there-upon.

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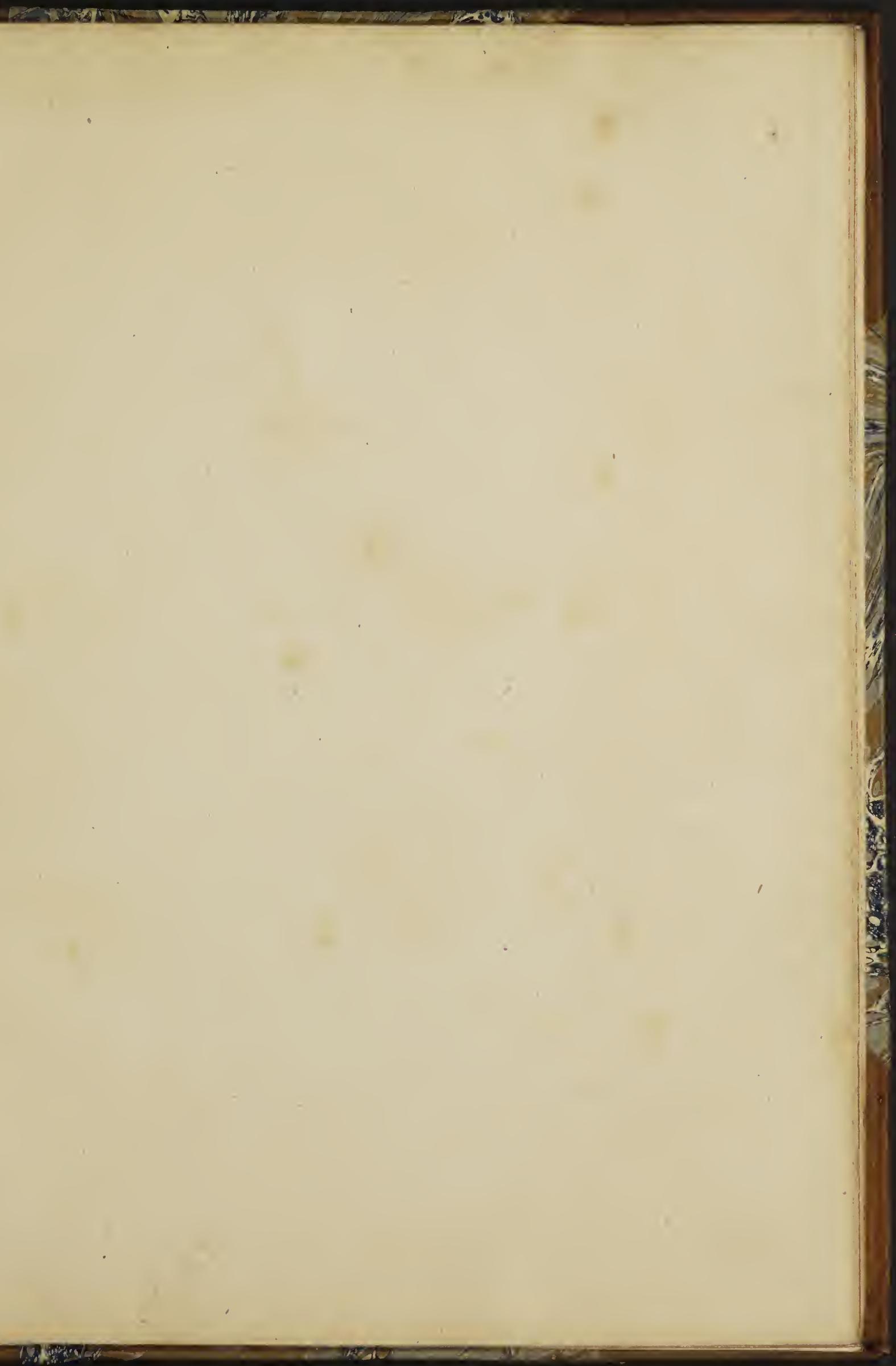
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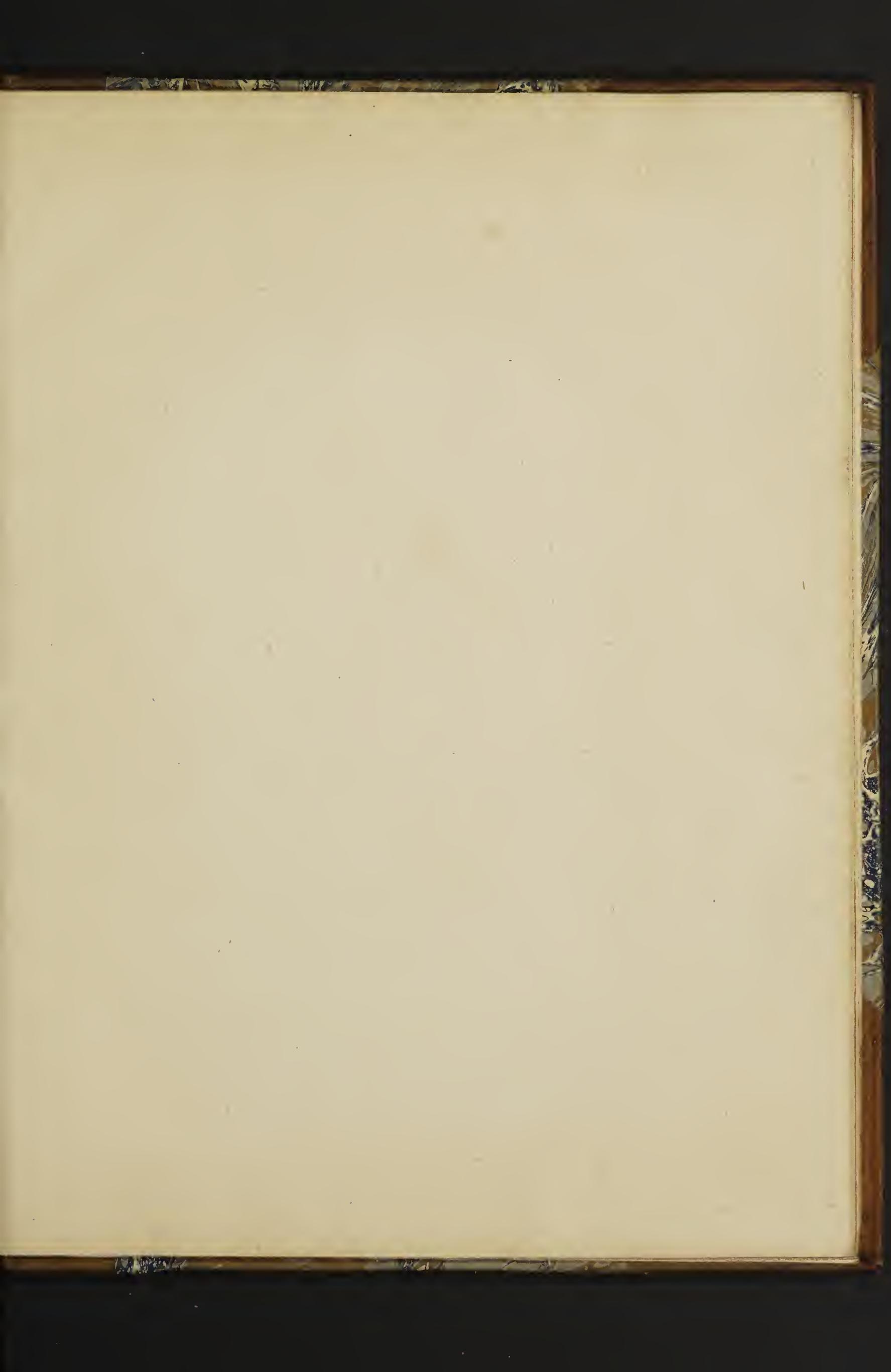
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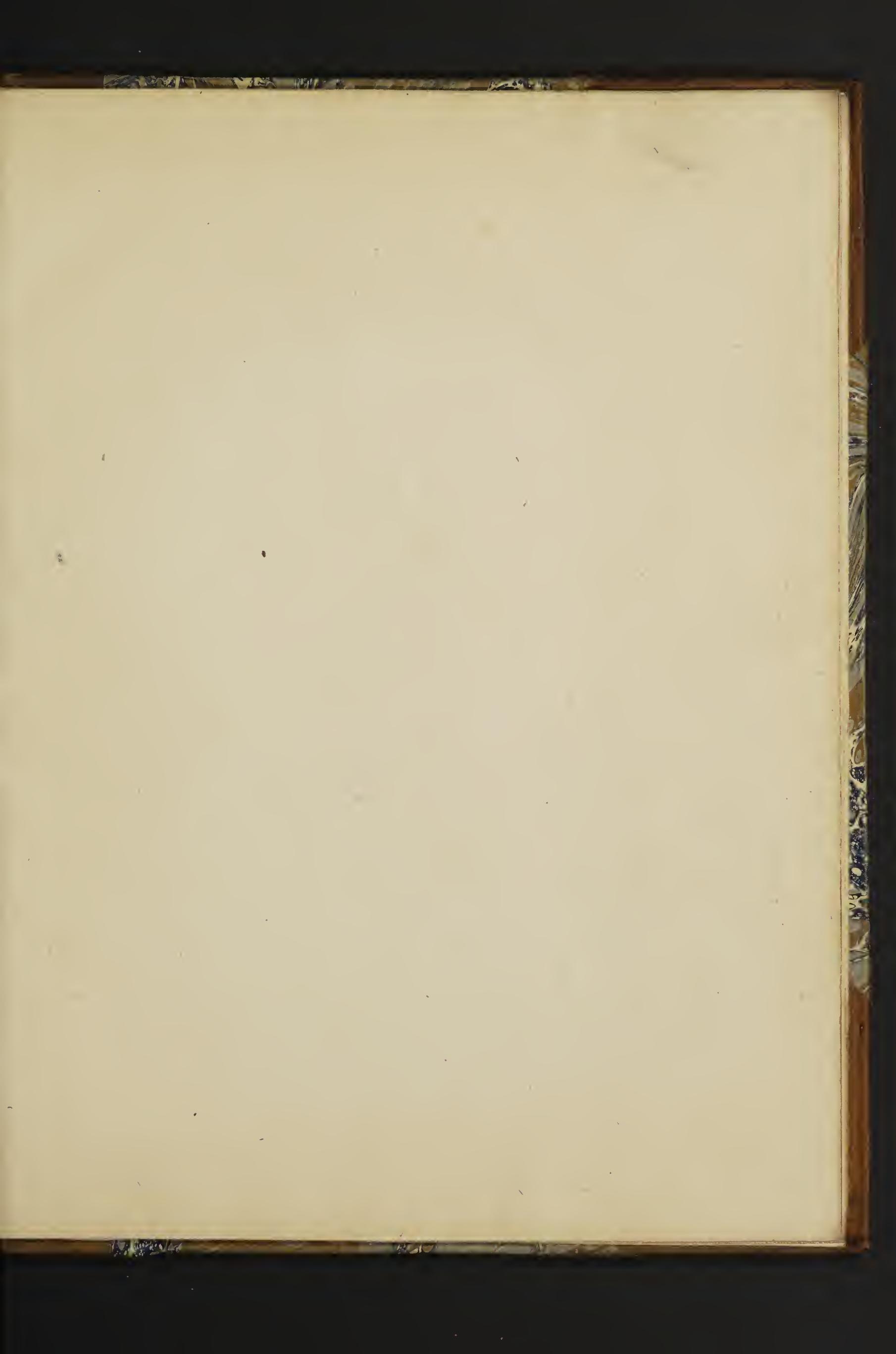




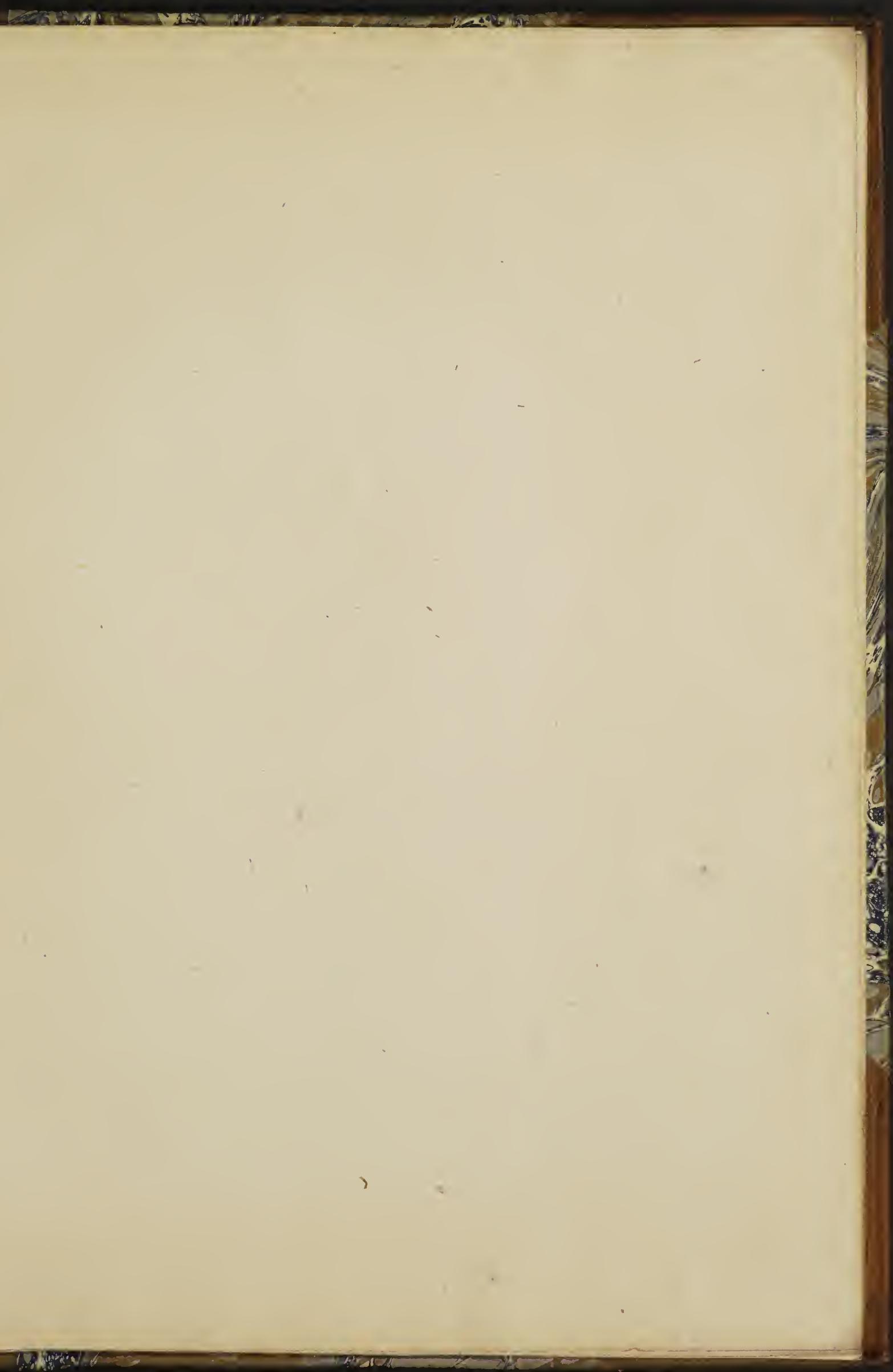


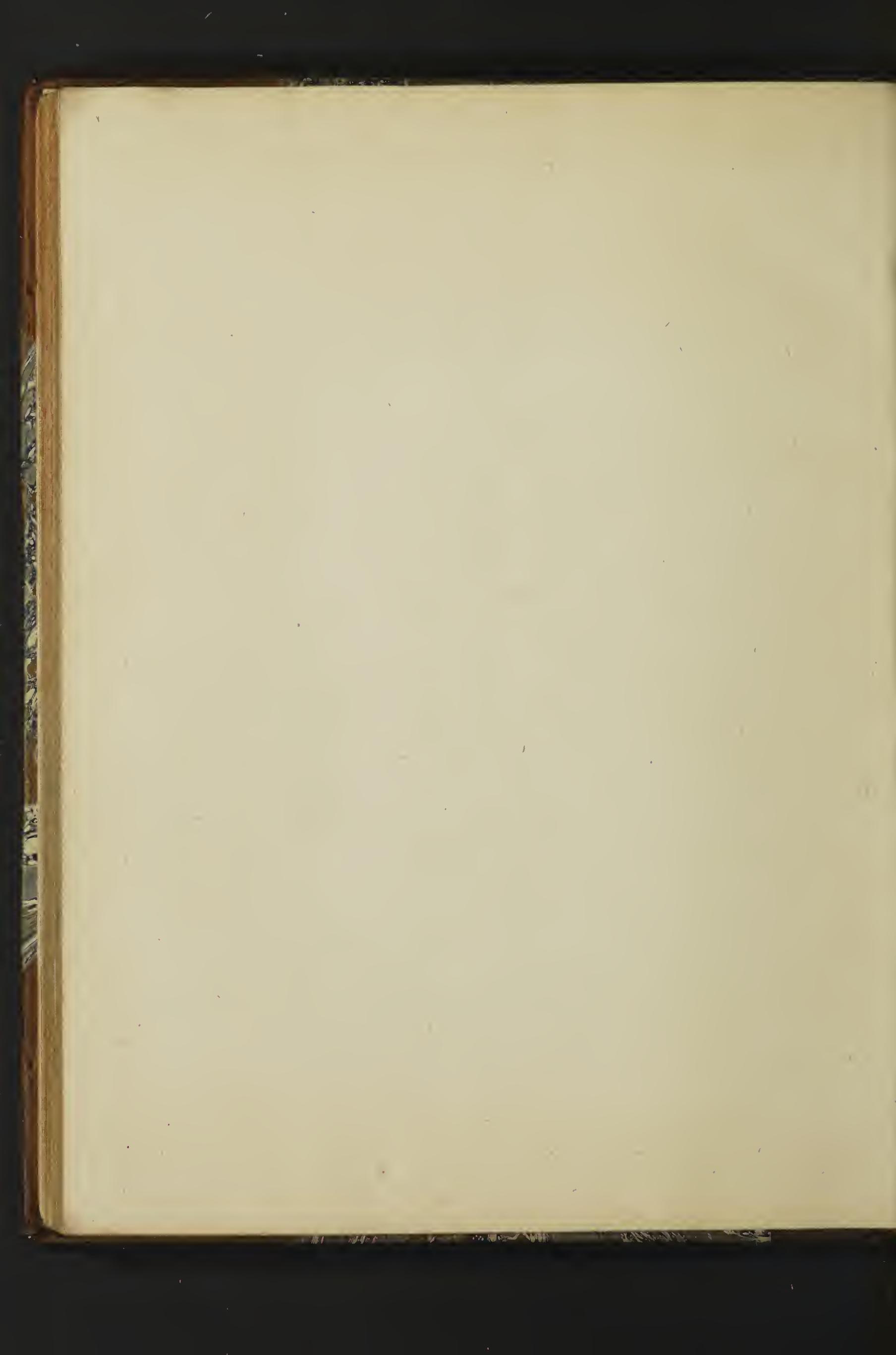


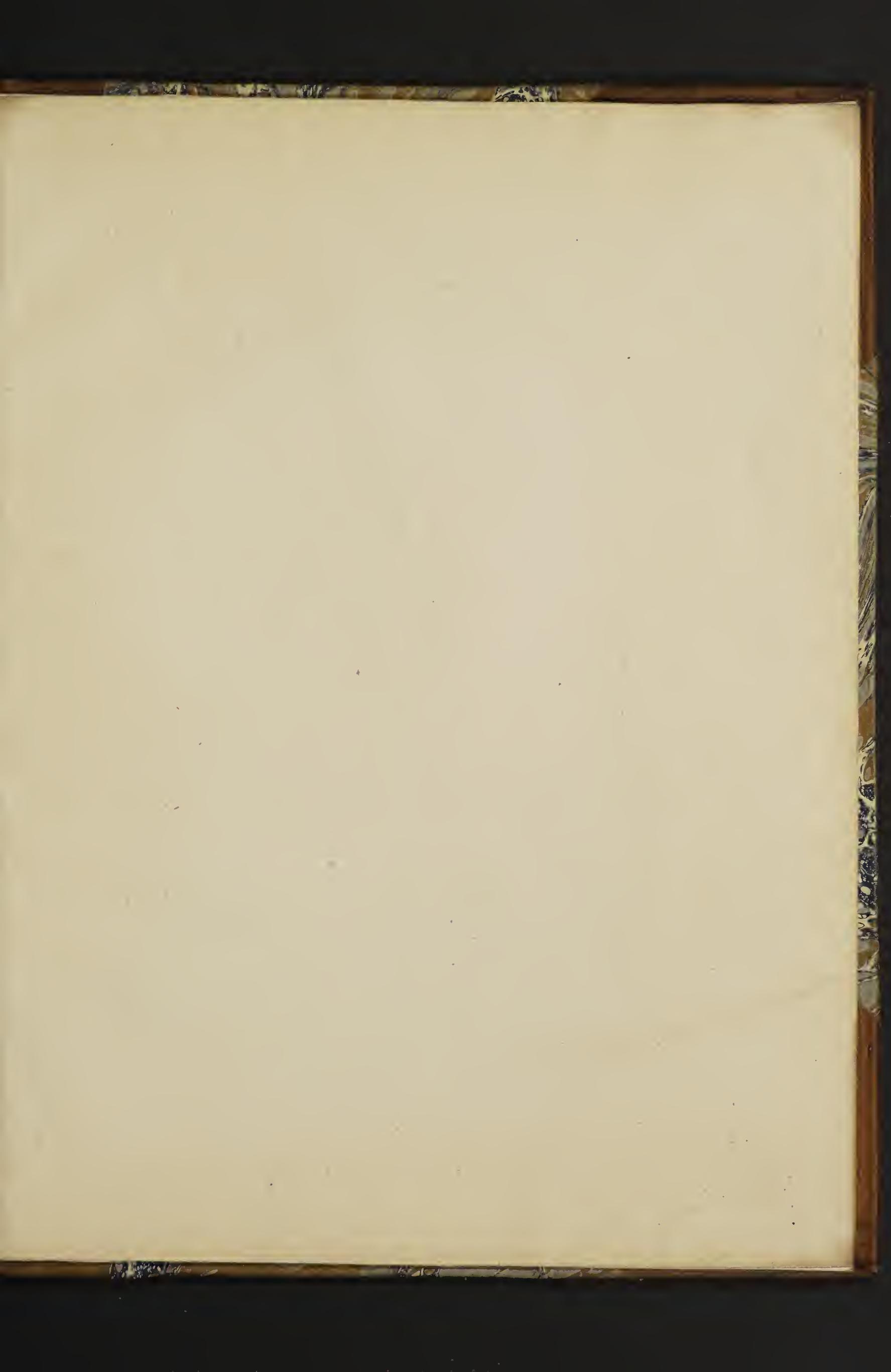




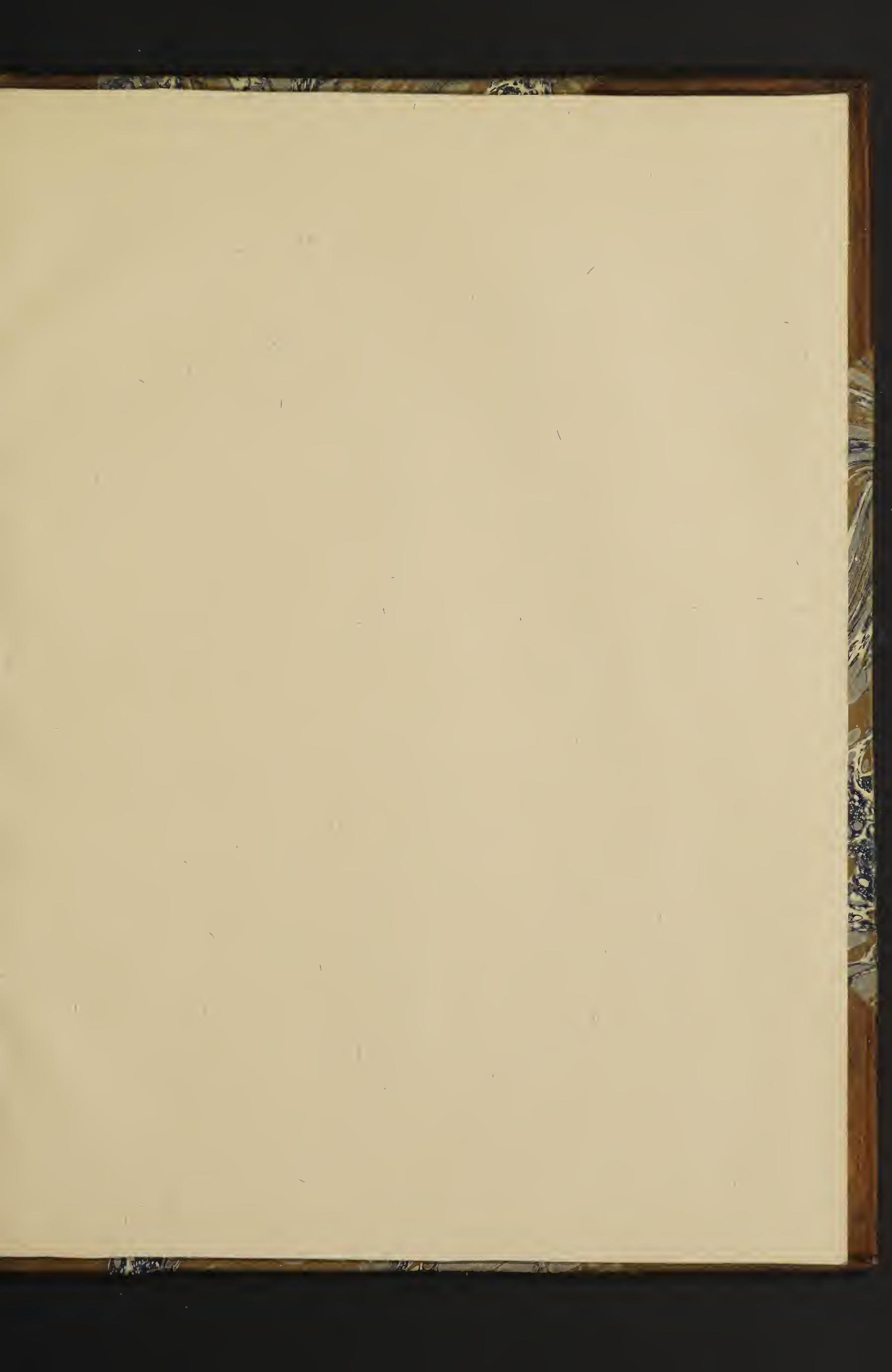


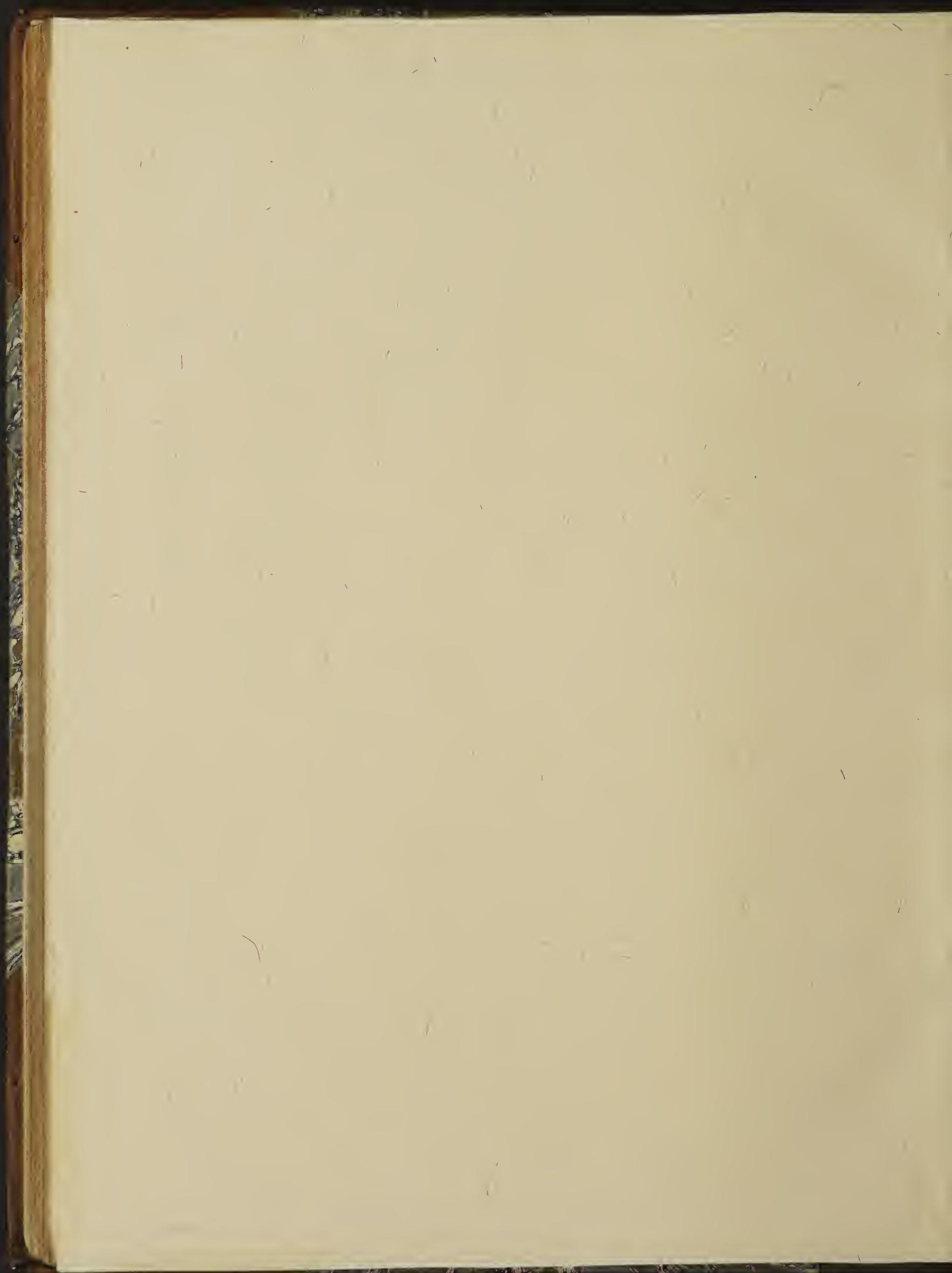


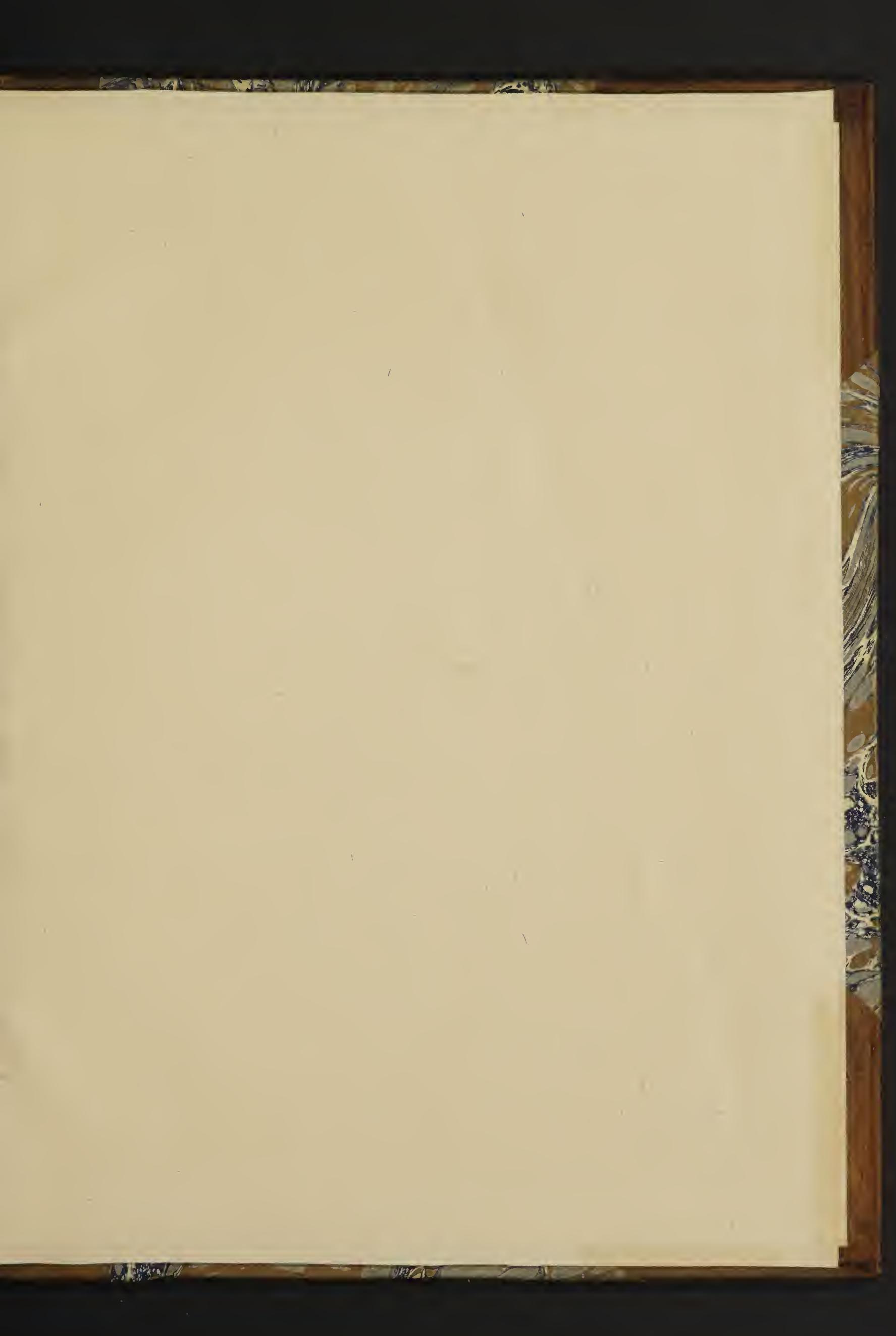














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